



PARIS, JANUARY 26TH – 28TH 2017

16TH INTERNATIONAL MARKETING TRENDS CONFERENCE

Marketing Trends Congress: Research Sessions January 26th – 24th 2017

The Marketing Trends Congress offers a great variety of research sessions. The authors come from 50 countries and include experienced academics as well as a number of younger researchers. The papers are presented in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. This has resulted in a rich cross-fertilization of ideas and perspectives.

Doctoral Colloquium: New Trends in Research in Marketing Thursday 26th January 2017

The Doctoral Colloquium is dedicated to outstanding doctoral students at an intermediate or advanced stage of their dissertation process, that are interested in new trends and developments in research in marketing.

Marketing Trends Award Friday 27th January 2017

The Marketing Trends Award is an international award that aims to honour researchers for their overall achievements in the field of Marketing Trends. The award is officially handed to the laureates at the Marketing Trends Conference.

Best Thesis Award - Marketing Trends January Thursday 26th

The International Best Thesis Award - Marketing Trends is given to recognize and encourage Ph.D. in marketing and emphasize their talent. The International finalists will be invited to present a 20 minutes oral defense of their thesis in English.

The conference fees will be covered by the organizing committee (Transports and accommodation costs are not included in the conference fees.).

Marketing Strategy Forum: A Call for Change Friday 27th January 2017

The Marketing Strategy Forum is more specifically dedicated to business and operational issues. The speakers of the Marketing Strategy Forum are all top business managers who come and share their experiences and their views with the conference participants and researchers.

Post-Doc Forum Saturday 28th January 2017

The Post-Doc Forum is open to Ph.D. students at an early stage of their career in marketing.

Workshop Sessions: Major Changes in Marketing Paradigms Saturday 28th January 2017

The special workshop sessions on the major changes in marketing paradigms and new fields of research are chaired by leading scholars coming from all over the world.

Registration

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75543 Paris Cedex 11 - France
Tel: +33 (0)1 49 23 22 96

Website Registration

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JOURNAL OF MARKETING TRENDS RANKED

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A QUARTERLY
PUBLICATION OF THE
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JOURNAL OF MARKETING TRENDS

The Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT) is published by the Marketing Trends Association (Paris-Venice Association). The Journal of Marketing Trends is positioned as the academic publication dedicated to Research on the Marketing Trends and to supporting its development.

All articles are evaluated through a double blind review process which is ensured, first by the Country Editorial Board (2 anonymous reviewers) and secondly by the Board of Editors (anonymous international reviewing process). The papers are an original material that has been neither published nor presented elsewhere, and that respects research ethics guidelines.

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In the context of rapid environmental change, 10 marketing scholars (1) Prof. Jean-Claude Andreani (ESCP Europe, Paris campus), Prof. Umberto Collesei (Università Ca' Foscari, Venice, Italy), Dott.sa Françoise Conchon (market research institute, Insemma, Paris), Prof. Chris Halliburton - (ESCP Europe, London campus), Prof. Abraham Koshy (IIMA Ahmedabad, India), Prof. Taihong Lu (Sun Yat-Sen University, China), Prof. Jean-Louis Moulins (Aix-Marseille Université, France), Prof. José Mugica (Universidad Pública de Navarra, Spain), Prof. Tiziano Vescovi (Università Ca' Foscari, Venice, Italy), Prof. Klaus-Peter Wiedmann (Universität Hannover, Germany) decided to launch the Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT) in 2010 in 5 Languages : English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and to print it in two languages (author language + translation in English).

Journal of Marketing Trends(JMT) Positioning

1. Since then we became the academic publication which recognises the work of researchers concerned with new trends and developments in marketing
2. We encouraged cross-disciplinary research on the major changes in marketing paradigms and new fields of original research in all aspects of marketing
3. We developed cross-country and multi-cultural research of the requisite level of quality which can be published in either English, French, German, Italian or Spanish (including abstracts of all papers in English)
4. We published more than 200 papers and attracted high quality authors from all Continents (from 50 countries) who are developing knowledge on the major trends in marketing
5. We used the strength of the international editorial board to provide rapid support and feedback to reinforce the quality of the published work.
6. Now European Academic Associations (such as the French Foundation for Management Education, FNEGE) supported by 24 academic associations ranked the Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT) using the criteria : international recognition of the quality of the journal, the international character of the editorial board, the quality of the review process, respect for academic standards of evaluation (double blind), selectivity, welcoming original contributions.

What is marketing? what is marketing trend?

Appearing in the early 2000's, research on Marketing Trends developed with the creation of the International Marketing Trends Conference. Although in the early 2000s some authors predicted the end of marketing, and others wanted to redefine it, without really knowing in what way, the subject itself continues to forge ahead. The *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* is a testimony to this dynamism. This is all the more true now that firms have integrated factors such as digital marketing, co-creation, Corporate Social Responsibility, environmental concerns, sustainable development, ethics and the economic crisis. All these factors are major transformations which change the rules of the game and make us rethink the relationships between the client and the corporation.

The *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* aims to be a focus for scientific debate based upon rigorous research, dealing with the changing marketing paradigm and following the goals it has previously set.

First we need to consider the **epistemological question (3): what is marketing?** What purpose does it serve? Who are the stakeholders? To whom it is addressed? The American Marketing Association, which sets itself as the authority on the subject, has changed its official definition of marketing twice in 70 years (in 2004 and 2007). If one compares these marketing evolutions to those of technological progress (for example aircraft, the internet or mobile phones) over the same period, two changes is not much. Theoretical issues revolving around the mission of marketing, its activities or stakeholders, still need to be dealt with. In a recent paper some authors suggest reintroducing the word "stakeholder" which was mentioned in 2004 and then dropped in 2007, in the AMA definition. Is this enough? Other researchers consider that the evolution of the concept of marketing derives from our own representation of that concept. Shouldn't we also think about concepts such as value creation and the fields of marketing research or research methods? The *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* aims to support these epistemological approaches as already outlined in previous editorials.

Secondly we need to consider **another epistemological question: what is a marketing trend?** The *Journal of Marketing Trends* addressed a wide range of marketing topics dealing with the evolution of the Marketing field, the new trends in Marketing and Marketing methodologies: Marketing Management (marketing strategy, digital marketing,

brand management, communication, advertising, pricing, , retailing, distribution, sales, consumer behavior, consumer satisfaction, marketing research, etc). Similarly, special marketing applications such as services, tourism, culture, healthcare, automotive, banking, energy, Luxury Goods, consumer goods, Media, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, Territorial Marketing, Kids & Teens; etc.

Innovation / Novelty

The *Journal of Marketing Trends* publishes papers across **the entire spectrum of marketing**, which bring **novelty** to marketing theory and practice and innovation in marketing research methods. The *Journal of Marketing Trends* published a broad spectrum, from empirical research to conceptual articles and address a wide range of marketing topics dealing with the evolution of the marketing field (2). Marketing Management (e.g. communications, brand management, electronic marketing, pricing, product decisions, retailing...), Consumer Behavior, Special Marketing Applications (e.g. services, tourism, culture, healthcare...), Marketing Research, and RELATIONSHIP MARKETING (i.e. trust, CRM, The development of the transactional and relational approaches in marketing, papers focused on customer loyalty and long-term customer engagement rather than shorter-term goals like customer acquisition and individual, strong, even emotional, customer connections to a brand that can lead to ongoing business, free word-of-mouth promotion and information from customers that can generate leads. ...).

Another concern of research in marketing involves the duality Consumer Behavior - Marketing Management. Researchers and marketers never share the same point of view on this matter. Some, that would be the researchers, want to explore the intimate and complex mechanisms and are attentive to a scientific conclusion and statistical results, making the reading of their papers arduous for non-professionals. Others, the marketers this time, are sensitive to the main action keys found on the market and are looking for innovations that appeal to them. The *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* published papers that meet this dual aspiration (3). This duality has for consequence the stimulation of innovative work on fields left unexplored. Publications have been the ambition of proposing new and solid views on marketing knowledge!

We categorized **innovative research in marketing** and our assessment of papers as follows (6):

- **Leading Novelty / Innovation:** path breaking papers bringing major progress in marketing knowledge / theory; papers with breakthrough innovation in research methods.
- **High Novelty / Innovation:** papers extending the scope and understanding of previous findings in marketing knowledge / theory; papers providing major contributions to research tools and methods.
- **Moderate Novelty / Innovation:** rigorous papers that replicate models in different settings which can be used for further theoretical reviews or empirical generalisations; papers extending the validity of established research instruments.
- **Low Novelty / Innovation:** papers that replicate models rigorously and which contribute to increased confidence in the research methods used but if they are seen as potentially useful for the consolidation of existing knowledge.
- **Little Novelty / No Innovation:** primarily descriptive papers or reviews with little contribution to existing knowledge; papers based upon 'convenience' or unsubstantiated sampling (including the use of students where these are not the relevant sample universe or isolated country examples without justification of the country selection process); papers exhibiting little innovation or insufficient rigour; replications of similar empirical settings. This level of papers is excluded.
- Each issue of the *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* developed new ideas, to encourage new research perspectives, and to explore new trends in marketing, seeking to preserve the diversity of different points of view – diversity of marketing topic; of theory and practice (and the links between the two); of cross-industry or cross-country context; and especially of future trends or new thinking in marketing
- *The Journal of Marketing Trends* stimulated multi-country or cross-cultural work and to act as an international arena of scientific debate. The International Board of Editors and the local Editorial Boards (eight countries), which share diverse research cultures and academic backgrounds, looks for supporting a cross-fertilisation of ideas and perspectives. Each issue of the *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* seeks to be the voice of both the richness of countries and academic schools, and the variety of methods of research and topics.

Research Process

Research, and in particular research into marketing trends, can have a strong national cultural dimension. It can depend upon the ways of thinking, the educational paradigms and the respective knowledge of the researchers' countries of origin

and location, even if research methodologies are generally seen as universal. Whilst respecting this diversity, in particular thanks to its country and international editorial boards, the *Journal of Marketing Trends* (4) nevertheless seeks articles which demonstrate a clear validation of findings ("proof") and clear justification of the chosen research methods.

It seeks studies of marketing issues or trends of contemporary, and ideally of international, significance which uses data and theory to address research questions and/or to test research hypotheses whose aim is to discover something of both academic significance and managerial importance. The *JMT* is neutral as to particular research methodologies, although it does give some priority to papers that provide empirical evidence. It seeks to encourage methodological diversity and subscribes to the view that different research methods should be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

The *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* expects rigour with respect to the supporting evidence or data, appropriate grounding in existing theoretical knowledge and research, and results which can be properly validated. 'Theory' implies both that the paper is positioned with respect to what is already known about the chosen issue from the academic and professional literature and that the findings can be defended as sound because they are well grounded empirically and conceptually and they 'make sense' with regard to existing knowledge and they 'account for' the data.

- The *JMT* does give priority to empirical studies, which can be qualitative, observational or quantitative provided that the chosen methodology is appropriate to the research questions and that sampling issues are appropriately handled.
- The *JMT* encourages papers which are drawn from the relevant target groups, such as consumers, practitioners, brands, or companies rather than 'convenience' sampling (such as students, unless they represent the target population) and for cross-cultural studies, a justification of the chosen countries of study. Relevance as well as rigour is the goal.
- The *JMT* also seeks conceptual papers where these clearly advance marketing knowledge with management implications. Such papers should be appropriately grounded in existing theory, be clearly structured and hopefully lead to new models or new relations between established constructs, and again which have managerial implications.

The *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* expects a clear explanation and justification of the chosen research process. This should include:

- In the introduction, what are the new areas of research or the new trends which are to be studied
- For the literature review, selected reference to work which is relevant, significant and recent, in addition to the seminal material, as well as the authors' own critical review.
- For the methodology, systematic explanation of any hypotheses and their source and a clear justification of the chosen methods, why these are appropriate to the research question when compared to alternative methods
- In the results, discussion and conclusion, a critical evaluation of the findings and how these relate to existing knowledge
- In the limitations and future research, an honest appraisal of the research constraints and the methodology chosen and a view on how future work could extend into new fields which are relevant.
- For the management implications reference to existing practice and what changes marketing practitioners might make as a result of the research
- The *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* has as its goal the stimulation and encouragement of academic debate and knowledge about trends in marketing thinking, practice and research methods, especially if international, cross-border or cross-marketing discipline. This can be empirical or conceptual provided that the papers show the appropriate level of validation ("proof"), rigour and relevance.

Marketing Trends Papers

the question which then must be asked is the following: what does differentiate a Marketing Trends paper from another paper? The whole research report is involved (5).

First, research objectives are modified. A Marketing Trends paper aims to develop new ideas, new theoretical and practical research perspectives, to explore new trends in marketing, cross-industry, cross-disciplinary or cross-country context; major changes in marketing paradigms and especially of future trends or new thinking in marketing. Several types of papers are expected: rigorous papers that replicate models in different settings, papers extending the validity of established research instruments, papers extending the scope and understanding of previous findings; papers providing major contributions to research tools and methods, papers with breakthrough innovation in research methods or in marketing knowledge.

Second, the review of literature shows concepts in a new light. Only references which are relevant, significant and recent, must be selected, in addition to the seminal material, as well as the authors' own critical review. From an academic perspective (3), the aim is to conceptualize research, highlight issues and illustrate the different trends of thought and scientific controversies. The managerial dimension is also important to contextualize the research. Through an analysis of non-academic journals and works by professional organizations, papers underline evolutions from the real world of practice and debates on the studied topic.

Third, scientific demonstration guarantees the diversity of points of view—diversity of marketing topic; of theory and practice (and the links between the two); of methodology. We subscribe to the view that different research methods should be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. The modes of knowledge production can borrow deductive, inductive or abductive postures and even mix them. Marketing Trends papers give priority to empirical studies, which can be qualitative, observational or quantitative provided that the chosen methodology is appropriate to the research questions and that sampling issues are appropriately handled. For the methodology, Marketing Trends papers include a systematic explanation of any hypotheses and their source as well as a clear justification of the chosen methods, why these are appropriate to the research question when compared to alternative methods. This can be empirical or conceptual provided that the papers show the appropriate level of validation, rigor and relevance.

Fourthly, results and discussions provide academic debate and knowledge about trends in marketing thinking, practice and research methods. Not only are they properly validated, but they lead to a critical evaluation of the findings and how these relate to existing knowledge and new relations between established constructs. Results explain mutations, bring transformations of already existing paradigms and their unresolved problematic, new and emerging trends, long-term orientations or trends, or structural trends in the evolution of marketing knowledge.

Finally, Marketing Trends papers place emphasis on limitations, further research and the managerial implications of results, in order to develop fundamental research and marketing knowledge that can be applied in practice. In the limitations and further research, they include an honest appraisal of the research constraints and the methodology chosen as well as a view on how

future work could extend into new fields which are relevant. For the management implications, they refer to existing practice and explain what changes marketing practitioners might make as a result of the research.

In conclusion, Marketing Trends papers are especially **relevant to researchers and managers** concerned with how marketing is evolving and in new marketing perspectives and approaches. They aim to be a focus for scientific debate based upon rigorous research, dealing with the changing marketing paradigm. They participate to the knowledge development on the major trends in marketing.

Reviewing process

The review process of the *Journal of Marketing Trends* (7) is organized in a Two Stage peer-review: local and international. The first step is the country level and its schools of thought. While there are international standards, experience has shown that with research on Marketing Trends, countries reflect their local orientations. The authors may share non-English language in their explanations and nuances with reviewers belonging to their community. The Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT) publishes papers in both the language of the author and in English. So far five languages were published: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The goal is to open up new opportunities for marketing research (7), to validate new ideas and to attract authors around the world.

First, each country or geographic areas has its editorial organization, with an Editor-in-Chief, an editorial board and a review committee. The Country Editor-in-Chief receives the papers and manages double-blind reviewing process (two anonymous reviewers). If their view is positive, two or three review rounds are required to improve the paper and avoid oversights or flaws (7). Country Editors then submit papers to the International Board of Editors according to the reviewers' opinion and on the potential the paper to be recognized and ranked among the best from their country.

The second level of selection of papers is managed by the International Editorial Board. This committee is composed of ten members (Editors and Country Editors), who meet twice a year (April and September Round). The selection is anonymous (authors' names are not mentioned) and Countries Editors are not involved in the selection of their submitted articles. For each paper, the Board

of Editors gives its approval for: publication (with no or minor revisions); to be resubmitted again to the Country Editorial Board (major revisions); rejection. The final decision and final manuscript preparation are communicated to authors by Country Editors. The role of the International Editorial Board is to harmonize the selection of papers, to assess trends and innovations at international level and to check their scientific qualities. Between the country level and international level, two out of ten papers are selected (the final selection rate is around 20%).

Editorial committee

The International Board of Editors and the local Editorial Boards (in eight countries), which share diverse research cultures and academic backgrounds, seek to support the cross-fertilisation of ideas and perspectives. The 150 members of the country scientific committees and the 400+ reviewers share similar goals, each bringing their experience of research and understanding of marketing trends.

The members of Country Editorial Boards are professors who are academic leaders in their own country. They share similar criteria for evaluating papers (5): (a) degree of innovation, (b) participation in knowledge about trends in marketing, (c) ability to conceptualize the objectives in the literature review, (d) strength and rigor of the scientific evidence, (f) inputs and outcomes research and managerial implications. The country reviewers follow the substance and form international recommendations. The selection is based on the published rules of the major academic journals in marketing.

The idea of developing a Marketing Trend Radar

The more complex and dynamic the marketer's world gets, the more we have to understand the underlying trends which mark the directions of future developments. This is true for marketing practitioners as well as for marketing scientists. *The Journal of Marketing Trends* (8) took part in this debate by publishing articles which will highlight the new trends in our discipline while respecting the plurality and diversity of researches. Which fields of trends are relevant?

Regarding the boundaries of the marketing discipline, our objects of experience and knowledge, we have to highlight first of all the **broadening and deepening of the marketing concept** as two important mega trends which since the 1970's

already had, but in future will continue to have, an important impact on the development of marketing thought. Broadening refers to the fact that besides companies in different industries more and also other social entities (individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, cities, nations etc.) are using the ideas of marketing for designing their exchange processes to market goods, services, ideas, places, persons, and organizations. Moreover, marketing's focus was broadened to include a social entity's transactions with all of its publics.

Paying attention to **all stakeholders** and not only to customers is already closely related to the deepening of marketing, especially when interests of other stakeholders or more generally, of Society are incorporated in designing exchange processes. Deepening of marketing is here characterized by a more systemic view as well as by the perspective of social responsibility. To ensure such an orientation in the case of companies, marketing was more and more developed as a comprehensive concept of societal and strategic corporate leadership.

With the goal to **make marketing "science" more "scientific"**, marketing thinking was profoundly dominated by the empiricist world view and the logical empiricist paradigm. Since then many different scientific orientations (empiricism, constructivism, and criticism), **paradigms (market, political economy, network business and corporate social responsibility paradigms), metaphors** (subjective world metaphor, liberating metaphor etc.), **methodologies** and methods of puzzle solving (quantitative vs. qualitative research, mixed research) are having an impact on marketing research. Such an epistemological differentiation might be treated as an important **trend towards pluralism** in scientific marketing research. Also an expression of this trend is the elaboration of marketing theory along **different perspectives**: micro perspective = marketing of individuals or organizations, meso perspective = marketing from the perspective of complex networks (distribution channels, supply chains, strategic alliances, industries etc.) or issues (realizing specific ecological and/or social goals), and macro perspective = **analyzing marketing structures and processes as well as their impacts and consequences from a comprehensive societal perspective.**

A third and of course very important field of marketing **trends** are those trends **in the marketing environment** which address a) general trends of **societal change** or more specific dynamics in economic, technological, socio-cultural, political-

legal, and ecological conditions, b) trends in industry and/or market structures and processes, and c) trends regarding the conditions, requirements and expectations, thoughts and feelings, and especially behaviors of all stakeholders (customers, suppliers, retailers, competitors, consumer groups, media etc.). These trends are either discussed more in general or more specifically in view of relevant challenges (chances and risks) for marketers of all kind. The wide range of trends starts with mega trends such as globalization, digitalization, virtualization, growing international competition and very concrete trends such as consumers' information and buying behavior in the context of societal and market changes.

Of course, last but not least, those trends which describe **the development of marketing management** approaches of different marketers are of special interest. Partly they might only mirror already implemented marketing concepts as a reaction of marketing practice on environmental changes, partly they might also reflect normative concepts developed in marketing science to help marketers to meet relevant challenges in a better way. No matter if more descriptive or normative such **marketing management trends** range from comprehensive concepts of a marketing-oriented corporate leadership (corporate marketing) to new means of market research and the planning, implementing, and controlling of the 4, or 7, P's. And in between trends in several management fields have to be taken into account. For instance, trends in the field of normative and strategic management like new approaches in defining corporate identity and culture, defining the business and business mission (new goal systems, concept of corporate social responsibility), designing positioning, targeting, branding as well as **cooperation strategies** (strategic alliances, efficient consumer response networks etc.). But also trends in the field of designing and implementing information systems, organizational processes and structures and new reward systems which help to sensitize employees to cope with new challenges and to secure the implementation of an economically efficient as well as societally responsible corporate policy.

Research chair

In all fields of marketing trends the dialogue between marketing scholars as well as **marketing practitioners** of different institutions and countries should be advanced systematically. As part of the International Conference Marketing Trends, we have created **research chairs** (8) and a research program called **Marketing Trends Radar or International Marketing Trends Review**. The

objective is to obtain a clear view ranging from a big picture to a more detailed understanding of the main trends both in the field of marketing science and of marketing management. This program is open to all researchers who wish to participate and are concerned with new trends and developments in marketing. Radar System the *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)* will play an important role.

Radar Papers

We have created the “Radar Paper” series and a third level of selection of papers specialized in “marketing trends radar”.

- **Radar Papers are a specific section of the *Journal of Marketing Trends (JMT)*. It consists of radar papers only.**
- **Each issue (JMT) gives a voice to researchers as well as to practitioners from all areas and all continents who are developing knowledge on the major trends in marketing:** new theoretical and practical marketing perspectives to encourage new research perspectives, and to explore new trends in marketing, seeking to preserve the diversity of different points of view – diversity of marketing topic; of theory and practice (and the links between the two); new fields of original research in all aspects of marketing; cross-country and cross-industry research; research on the major changes in marketing paradigms; new marketing approaches.
- **Radar Papers are papers written by researchers and practitioners regarding all fields of marketing trends:** market, political economy, network business and the corporate social responsibility paradigms, marketing structures and processes, societal change or more specific dynamics in economic, technological, socio-cultural, political-legal, and ecological conditions, trends in industry.
- **Radar Papers publish papers across the entire spectrum of marketing,** which bring all fields of marketing trends: customers, consumers, community, stakeholders, companies, marketing structures and processes.
- **Radar Papers cover all economic sectors and industry:** Automotive, B To B, Bank & Finance, Consumer Goods / Manufacturing, Construction, Culture, Education / Public administration, Financial Marketing, Healthcare Industry, Industry / Innovation, Kids & Teens, Luxury Goods, Media,

Mobile phone / Internet / digital, Non-profit Organization, Retail & Distribution, Senior, SME Medium Sized Enterprises, Territorial Marketing, Tourism & Leisure.

- **Radar papers** have their editorial organization, with an Editor-in-Chief, an editorial board and a review committee.

- **The role of the Radar Editorial Board** is to harmonize the selection of papers, to assess trends and innovations and to check their scientific qualities (interest to researchers, to managers, quality of information, originality, easy to read..)

- For each paper, **the Board of Editors** gives his approval for publishing: to be published (with minor revisions), to be resubmitted again (major revisions), no to be published. The final decision and final manuscript preparation are communicated to authors.

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Social capital for online and offline brand communities: The Weight Watchers' case

Quel capital social pour les communautés de marques en ligne et en face à face ?

L'exemple de Weight Watchers

Résumé

Cette recherche qualitative explore le concept de capital social dans deux communautés de la marque Weight Watchers qui communiquent différemment : l'une en face à face et l'autre en virtuel. Trois méthodes ont été mobilisées : longs interviews, observation participante et netnographie. Il en résulte que les six dimensions du capital social que sont la conscience commune, la ritualisation, le volontarisme, l'altruisme orienté, la réciprocité et la confiance sociale, se manifestent différemment dans la communauté off-line et on-line pour une même marque. Ces résultats peuvent contribuer à éclairer les stratégies d'animation des communautés de marque.

Mots clés : Capital Social, communautés en ligne, e-community manager, netnographie

Abstract

This qualitative research investigates the social capital of two brand communities, belonging to the Weight Watchers company, that communicate in two different ways: One face to face and the other online. For this work, we have used three methods of inquiry: Long interviews, participant observation and netnography. We find that voluntarism, oriented altruism, reciprocity and social trust are expressed differently depending on whether the brand community communicates online or offline. These results can support strategies related brand community management

Key words: Social capital, online communities, e-community manager, netnography

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Quel capital social pour les communautés de marques en ligne et en face à face ?

L'exemple de Weight Watchers

« C'est par et dans la communication que les êtres se construisent et se définissent »

Lipiansky (1992, p. 30)

Les communautés de marque constituent un nouveau contexte de communication où le rapport du consommateur à la marque est central (McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz et O'Guinn 2001). Cette forme de réseau émergent incorpore une dimension sociale de la consommation où les individus établissent des liens de collaboration réciproque (Fukuyama 2001). Le capital social qui en découle, ciment des membres de ces communautés, devient alors une source de support intangible aux intérêts que visent les individus (Coleman 1988). Il relève de relations sociales fondées sur des dimensions comme le volontarisme, la réciprocité, et la confiance sociale (Newton 1997 ; Mathwick et al. 2008 ; Coleman 1988). Ce capital social devient une ressource pour les membres de la communauté concernée sous forme d'informations utiles, de relations personnelles et de capacités d'organisation de groupes (Paxton 1999). Et bien sûr, ce capital social accroît le capital de la marque dans sa dimension "capital-client de la marque" ("customer-based brand equity") selon la définition de (Aaker 1996, 7-8)¹.

Dans un modèle de communication classique, le capital social se développe en situation de face à face des membres qui se reconnaissent dans « leur » marque. Mais, avec Internet, de nouveaux moyens de communication sont apparus. Depuis une dizaine d'années, les communautés virtuelles ont occupé le devant de la scène, car le web ayant permis de dynamiser les interactions sociales en permettant à chacun d'accéder à l'information et aux échanges sociaux de manière à la fois simplifiée et amplifiée (Benghozi 2010 ; Howard et al. 2001). La technologie favorise une création d'actions novatrices dans la pratique sociale (Proulx 2005) et certains pensent que le web créerait des relations aussi solides en ligne qu'en face à face (Wellman et Gulia 1999), tout comme il établirait des liens entre diverses cultures et élargirait ainsi le partage d'intérêts (Weisband et al. 1995). Ainsi, la communication via le web engendre un contenu propre à la communauté virtuelle (Lee et al. 2003), tout comme elle est support de médiation au sein de celle-ci, car chaque membre est à la fois producteur et consommateur d'échange social (Paquenseguy 2007). De plus, vis-à-vis des entreprises commerciales, les communautés en ligne permettent de « protéger » l'intimité du

Social capital for online and offline brand communities:

The Weight Watchers' case

« It is through and within communication that human beings construct and define themselves » Lipiansky (1992, p. 30)

Brand communities are a new communication context that revolves around the relationship of consumers with their brands (McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). This emerging form of community incorporates a social dimension to consumption that makes individuals establish reciprocal collaboration ties (Fukuyama 2001). This results in a social capital that binds members of these communities and becomes a source of support to individuals' interest (Coleman 1988). It is constructed through social relationships based on dimensions such as voluntarism, reciprocity, social trust (Newton 1997 ; Mathwick et al. 2008 ; Coleman 1988). Hence, this social capital becomes a resource for the members of the community that translates into useful information, personal relationships and group organisational skills (Paxton 1999). Furthermore, it increases brand capital in the «customer-based brand equity» sense, based on the definition of (Aaker 1996, 7-8) .

From the classical communication perspective, social capital develops through face-to-face communication of members that associate themselves with « their » brand. However, Internet has led to the emergence of new means of communication. For the past ten years, online communities have come to the spotlight, since the web has fueled social interactions. It has increased the access to information and to social exchange in a simple yet magnified way (Benghozi 2010 ; Howard et al. 2001). Technology favors the creation of innovative actions within social practice (Proulx 2005). Some think that the web creates online relationships that are as strong as the ones formed within a face-to-face context (Wellman et Gulia 1999). It also establishes ties between diverse cultures and spreads interest sharing (Weisband et al. 1995). This is how Internet communication generates a content that is specific to online community (Lee et al. 2003). It also acts as a support to the mediation within the community, as each member is at the same time a producer and a consumer of social exchange (Paquenseguy 2007). Moreover, from a managerial perspective, online communities offer a "protection" of the intimacy of the communicator since the individual can participate through the use of a nickname. This is not the case of face-to-face communication where disclosure is a mandate for participation to any communal activity (Lipiansky 1992).

communicateur, notamment par l'utilisation de pseudonymes, ce contrairement à la communication en face à face (Lipiansky 1992).

Compte tenu de son potentiel de génération de capital social, la majorité des grandes entreprises s'interroge sur la contribution potentielle des communautés en ligne à leur marque : doivent-elles en développer, ou encore investir sur les communautés qui se créent spontanément sur le Web ? L'objectif de notre recherche est d'observer la manifestation d'un capital social d'une même marque dans deux environnements de communication distincts, en ligne et classique, pour en comparer les mérites respectifs. Une recherche exploratoire préliminaire a permis d'identifier deux communautés de la marque Weight Watchers, l'une classique et l'autre en ligne, comme un terrain propice à la recherche. Cette entreprise, qui n'a pas changé de Business Model depuis des années (voir encadré 1), opère toujours par le biais de réunions hebdomadaires des membres depuis des décennies. Mais, elle met aussi à la disposition de tout public un forum sur son site Web. Nous avons observé que, dans ces deux espaces de communication – réel et virtuel –, les dimensions propres aux construits de communauté (conscience commune et ritualisation), mais aussi celles spécifiques à la dynamique d'un capital social (volontarisme, altruisme des membres, réciprocité et confiance mutuelle) se déclinaient de manière complémentaire. Après avoir présenté nos résultats, nous discuterons de leur impact potentiel aux plans managériaux et théoriques pour une marque qui jouerait de la synergie de représentations afin d'accroître « ses » capitaux sociaux.

COMMUNAUTÉ, CAPITAL SOCIAL ET COMMUNICATION

L'homme n'est pas de nature solitaire. Une force intangible conduit les individus à adhérer à des réseaux qui se développent en communautés partageant des intérêts, des visions et un sens du bien commun (Etzioni 1996). Ce concept de communauté s'est toujours prêté à des perspectives d'analyse très contrastées, car ses frontières et ses dimensions sont difficiles à identifier (Schrecker 2006). Ainsi, la communauté peut aller du petit groupe se composant de quelques individus au large regroupement qui devient une communauté globale. Des controverses existent aussi en ce qui concerne les éléments qui la définissent. Pour certains la communauté devient « la communication d'êtres singuliers séparés, qui n'existent comme tels qu'à travers cette dernière » (Nancy 1990, p. 256). Mais cette définition semble réductrice, car elle n'incorpore pas de dimension relevant des relations sociales et de la solidarité entre les individus.

When it comes to social capital generation, the majority of big companies are looking to understand the added value that these online communities may bring to their brand. Should they contribute to their development or invest in communities that self emerge on the web? The objective of our research is to observe the expression of social capital of the same brand within two different communication environments (online and face to face) to compare their advantages. A preliminary exploratory research has allowed us to identify two communities of the Weight Watchers brand (one offline and the other online) as a relevant research field. This company, whose business model did not change for years, (see display 1) still operates through weekly members' meeting. It also offers a public forum in its website. We have observed that within these two communication environments- offline and online-, the dimensions specific to communities (common consciousness and ritualisation), as well as those specific to the social capital (voluntarism, member's altruism, reciprocity and mutual trust) happened in a complementary way. First, we present our results, then we discuss their potential impact from a managerial and theoretical perspective for a brand that is geared towards a synergy of representations with the objective to increase its "social capitals".

COMMUNITY, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNICATION

Humans are not isolated beings. They are drawn together by an intangible force to form networks and communities to share common interests, visions and a common meaning (Etzioni 1996). The concept of community has been a source of disagreement among researchers as its boundaries are hard to determine (Schrecker 2006). Hence, a community can go from a small group made up of few individuals to the largest gathering that is the global community. There are also controversies when it comes to its defining elements. For some researchers the community is « the communication of distinct individuals, that can only exist as such through it » (Nancy 1990, p. 256). This definition seems undermining, as it does not incorporate the social dimension where individuals support each other. On the other hand, the early researchers in this area have always seen the community as an entity defined around the same special roots. Nowadays, the boom of the web leads companies to look at online communities either from a "vertical" perspective, lead by an e-manager and with few relationships between internet users, or as an idea generator with "horizontal" relationships between members (Benghozi 2010). Researchers have hence re-centered its definition away from its geographical

A contrario, les chercheurs pionniers dans le domaine ont toujours considéré la communauté en tant qu'entité se définissant autour des mêmes racines spatiales. Aujourd'hui, l'avènement de l'Internet conduit les entreprises à considérer les communautés en ligne de manière soit « verticale », sous la conduite d'un e-manager et avec peu de relations entre internautes, soit comme des forces de propositions émanant de relations « horizontales » entre membres (Benghozi 2010). Les chercheurs ont d'ailleurs recentré sa définition, non plus sur sa dimension géographique, mais sur une représentation sociale de communauté « imaginée » (Werry 2000). Ces modèles convergent sur une dimension communicationnelle toujours centrale puisque, par Internet, les membres peuvent se rejoindre à tout moment et où qu'ils soient (Rheingold 1993).

Pour réaliser la comparaison de deux communautés, nous avons cerné tout d'abord six dimensions fondamentales du capital social de marque, soit : la conscience commune, la ritualisation, le volontarisme de l'acteur, l'altruisme des membres, les normes de réciprocité et la confiance partagée.

- Une conscience commune : Le capital social s'enracine en premier lieu dans un espace communautaire où les membres se mettent en relation les uns avec les autres de manière naturelle, en partageant un objectif commun (Muniz et O'Guinn 2001). L'expérience partagée développe chez les membres un sentiment d'appartenance (Sitz et Amine 2004) qui renforce les actions collectives et la cohésion de groupe (Muniz et O'Guinn 2001). Ce sentiment repose, comme le souligne Nisbet (1984, p. 70) sur : « Les liens étroits affectifs, l'engagement profond et durable par un ordre moral et un engagement commun à un groupe social ». Le capital social s'enracine sur ces liens normés signes des conséquences positives de cette sociabilité sur l'individu (Adler et Kwon 2002). Ainsi, le capital social, ensemble des ressources d'interconnaissances et d'inter-reconnaissances, se développe par la communication entre membres en pleine conscience commune (Bourdieu 1980).

- La ritualisation : La communauté, où prend sa source le capital social commun, se manifeste au travers des rites qui servent de ligne de démarcation entre ceux qui font légitimement partie d'une communauté et ceux qui se situent dans le flou de la société en général (Bourdieu 1982) ou qui sont rattachés à une autre communauté (McAlexander et al. 2002). Rituels et traditions sont donc pratiques récurrentes (Muniz et O'Guinn 2001) qui peuvent se traduire par des attitudes, une ambiance, des gestes ou encore le statut particulier. Les membres d'une

anchoring and around a social representation of the « imagined » community (Werry 2000). These models come together around the communication dimension as the Internet allows members to get together anytime and from anywhere (Rheingold 1993).

In order to be able to compare these two communities, we have first identified six fundamental dimensions of the brand's social capital, that are: A common consciousness, ritualisation, the participant's voluntarism, oriented altruism, reciprocity norms and social trust.

- A common consciousness: The social capital is rooted within the communal space where members get in touch with one another in a natural way, and share a common objective (Muniz et O'Guinn 2001). The shared experience raises a feeling of belonging (Sitz et Amine 2004) that reinforces collective action and the group's cohesion (Muniz et O'Guinn 2001). This feeling, as Nisbet (1984, p. 70) outlines, lies on: « The tight affective ties, the profound and lasting engagement through a moral order and involvement that is common to a social group ». The social capital is rooted within these normative ties that portray the positive consequences of this sociability on the individual (Adler et Kwon 2002). Hence, the social capital, that is a group of resources of inter-knowledge and inter-recognitions, develops through communication between members who share a common conscience (Bourdieu 1980).

- Ritualisation: The community, which is the source of the common social capital, comes out through rites. These act as boundary markers between those that are legitimate members of a community and those whose position within society remains unclear overall (Bourdieu 1982) or those who are tied to another community (McAlexander et al. 2002). Rituals and traditions are hence recurring practices (Muniz et O'Guinn 2001) that can translate to mindsets, an atmosphere, gestures or a specific status. The members of a community take on habits associated with its own culture – informality in language is for example a tradition that highlights the members' proximity, (Sainsaulieu et al. 2010). The rituals also allow the enforcement of hierarchical relationships that contribute to the community organization. On the other hand, the common goals and interest give the community its meaning.

- Participant's voluntarism: This is a fundamental dimension of social capital and shows the free engagement of individuals within communal groups (schools, churches...) as they seek to sustain its social support (Labonte 1999). Community members do not enter into mere interpersonal relationships but rather chose solidarity to ensure the sustainability of the group (McAlexander et al. 2002).

communauté adoptent des habitudes associées à leur culture propre - le tutoiement étant, par exemple, une tradition qui dénote la proximité des membres - (Sainsaulieu et al. 2010). Les rituels permettent également de signifier les relations hiérarchiques qui organisent la communauté, alors que les buts et les intérêts communs d'une communauté lui donnent son sens.

- **Le volontarisme de l'acteur :** Le volontarisme, dimension fondamentale d'un capital social, est l'engagement bénévole d'individus au sein de groupes communautaires (écoles, églises...) dans le but d'en soutenir le support social (Labonte 1999). Il ne s'agit plus ici d'une relation interpersonnelle, mais de membres d'une communauté qui choisissent de devenir solidaires pour assurer la pérennité du groupe (McAlexander et al. 2002). La force du capital social découle de l'engagement volontaire des acteurs (Coleman 1988), et la communication en est l'élément clé (Amado et Guittet 2009). Ainsi, les interactions entre les membres renforcent la pérennisation des relations. Or, le monde du Web favorise l'expansion du bénévolat, car l'individu y est libre. Cette liberté d'entrer et de sortir rendrait la culture du volontarisme online encore plus véritable (Portes 1998). En d'autres termes, les individus peuvent devenir membres et solidaires d'un groupe sans craindre d'en devenir captifs, ce qui n'est pas le cas des communautés construites sur des relations en face à face (Balasurbramanian et Mahakan 2001).

- **L'altruisme orienté :** Au plan individuel, le capital social se manifeste d'abord par l'intérêt porté à l'autre au travers de la marque. Cette altérité, au sens de Weber (1922), s'appuie sur la coordination d'intérêts motivés de manière raisonnée par un objectif commun. Les individus mettent en place une organisation qui sert à la fois la collectivité et ses membres. Pour ce type de communauté « de destin », un cadre propice ne suffit pas, il faut des hommes pour l'animer et pour lui donner un sens et des repères. Selon Rhéaume (2010), ce type de communauté de destin s'articule autour de trois dimensions qui sont de fournir des services adaptés répondant aux besoins des membres, d'offrir des lieux et des temps d'échange et de solidarité, et de s'organiser pour défendre les droits des membres.

- **Les normes de réciprocité :** Elles sont constitutives du capital social, car elles garantissent à l'individu qui s'investit pour les autres de recevoir en retour un « contre-don » selon une perspective Maussienne, retour implicite qui advient à échéance non définie (Portes 1998). Accepter de recevoir crée l'obligation de donner à son tour lors d'une prochaine interaction. Cette réciprocité sociale devient plus conséquente si

The strength of social capital comes from the voluntary engagement of its participants (Coleman 1988), and communication is its key element (Amado et Guittet 2009). Hence, the interactions between members reinforce the sustainability of relationships. Nonetheless, the Internet, through the individual freedom that it offers, supports the expansion of voluntarism. This freedom of entering and exiting a group makes the culture of voluntarism even more real (Portes 1998). In other words, individuals can become members and show solidarity without fearing to become captive of the group. This is not the case of face-to-face communities (Balasurbramanian & Mahakan 2001).

- **Oriented altruism:** From an individual perspective, social capital lies within the interest people show to each other through the brand. This alterity, as defined by Weber (1922), lies within the coordination of conscious interest towards a common objective. The individual puts in place an organization that at the same time serves the community as well as its members. For this type of community « of destiny », a suitable environment is not enough. It requires active members to sustain it and give it its meaning and markers. According to Rhéaume (2010), this type of destiny community revolves around three dimensions that are: to provide services that match the needs of its members, to offer locations and times of exchange and of solidarity, and to get organized to defend the rights of its members.

- **Reciprocity norms:** This acts as a warrant for individuals that get involved in helping others to get back a « counter-gift » from Mauss's perspective. This implicit get-back has no defined deadline (Portes 1998). Accepting to receive, creates the obligation to give back during a future interaction. This social reciprocity is more relevant to the communal context where interactions are multiplied (McAlexander et al. 2002). In a community where reciprocity is strong, members care about each other's interests (Onyx & Bullen 2000). Some researchers say that the strength of ties is related to the physical proximity of members (Kraut et al. 1987). According to them, this does not apply to members of virtual communities, who can escape such constraints simply through a click (Smith & Kollock 1999). However, for Newton (1997) reciprocity norms depend on the readiness of individuals to cooperate instead of perceiving each other as strangers, competitors or potential enemies. Hence, the virtual community can become a reciprocity medium as it is based on values of cooperation put in place by members (Rheingold 1994).

- **Social trust:** Finally, social capital can only flourish when trust becomes a support of the overall communication between members. This

les interactions sont multipliées dans un contexte communautaire (McAlexander et al. 2002). Dans une communauté à forte réciprocité, les membres se soucient des intérêts des uns des autres (Onyx et Bullen 2000). Certains chercheurs préconisent une force de liens proportionnelle à la proximité physique (Kraut et al. 1987) et, de plus, les communautés virtuelles permettraient de s'échapper aisément de leurs contraintes par un simple clic (Smith et Kollock 1999). Mais, pour Newton (1997) les normes de réciprocité dépendent surtout de la prédisposition des individus à coopérer au lieu de se concevoir mutuellement comme des étrangers, des concurrents ou des ennemis potentiels. Ainsi, la communauté virtuelle peut devenir média de réciprocité puisqu'elle se fonde sur des valeurs de coopération mise en œuvre à la demande même des membres (Rheingold 1994).

- La confiance sociale : Finalement, le capital social ne peut s'épanouir que si la confiance est le support de la communication globale entre les membres. Cette confiance permet, selon Newton (1997, p. 576), de transformer « les imbéciles rationnels en des coopérateurs efficaces ». Et l'individu s'investit, donnant aux membres de la communauté sans se préoccuper d'être payé en retour, renforçant ce faisant son capital social (Portes 1998). La nature et l'intensité de la confiance au sein de communautés virtuelles seraient différentes (Mathwick et al. 2008). Traditionnellement, dans les communautés classiques, fermées et homogènes, la confiance est considérée comme inhérente à une solidarité générée par un contact intense et permanent de personnes ayant la même appartenance ethnique ou tribale (Newton 1997). On pourrait considérer l'environnement du web comme générateur de liens faibles, puisqu'il met en relation de parfaits étrangers dispersés géographiquement (Constant, Sproull et Kiesler 1996). Par ailleurs, l'anonymat des échanges serait peu propice à la construction de liens de confiance authentiques (Rheingold 1993 ; Constant et al. 1996). Il existe en effet de nombreuses communautés en ligne où la plupart des membres sont des « touristes » (Kozinets 1999, 2010) qui ne contribuent guère à l'échange communautaire et qui dépassent rarement le statut de receveur.

LE CAS WEIGHT WATCHERS

Notre terrain a été choisi parce qu'il offre deux champs d'observation parallèles pour un même objectif des membres : perdre du poids avec la méthode Weight Watchers. La première communauté est payante et se réunit en face à face chaque semaine. Une logique fonctionnaliste l'anime, car son attractivité pour les membres réside dans sa capacité à atteindre des objectifs quantitatifs, mesurables et précis.

trust allows, according to Newton (1997, p. 576), to transform « the rational imbeciles to efficient cooperators ». In this case, the individual gives to community members without worrying about a payback, which reinforces its social capital (Portes 1998). The nature and the intensity of trust within virtual communities may be different (Mathwick et al. 2008). Usually within traditional communities that are closed and homogeneous, trust lies within the solidarity that comes from intense and regular contact of individuals that have the same ethnic or tribal belonging (Newton 1997). From this perspective the web comes out as an inducer of weak links as it brings together perfect strangers that are geographically dispersed (Constant, Sproull & Kiesler 1996). On the other hand, the anonymity of the exchanges would challenge the building of authentic trust bonds (Rheingold 1993 ; Constant et al. 1996). There are many online communities where most of the members are « tourists » (Kozinets 1999, 2010) that do not contribute to the communitarian exchange and that rarely go beyond the status of receiver.

THE WEIGHT WATCHERS'S CASE

We have selected this research field because it offers two parallel environments of observation while all members' have the same objective that is to lose weight with the Weight Watchers' method. The first community has a membership fee and gathers weekly in face-to-face meetings. It has a functional role for members as its attractivity lies in being able to achieve quantitative objectives that are precise and measurable. This social gathering is determined by a generic communication function (that is identical in all the meetings in the world) which allows to reach individual objectives. The second online group does not have a predefined meeting structure. The exchanges happen within the forum that is hosted in the website of Weight Watchers Switzerland. It is open to all individuals and management does not control membership. Members come looking for a form of belonging while preserving their individuality, freedom of entering and leaving the group (Cova 1997).

Frame 1: Weight Watchers Switzerland

Weight Watchers was founded by Jean Nidtech in 1963. She decided to launch the company after organizing weekly meeting with her friends to exchange tips to lose weight. Weight Watchers started its international operations in 1973. Today, Weight Watchers is a global corporation quoted in the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). It's

Ce regroupement social est déterminé par une fonction communicationnelle générique (identique dans les différents centres dans le monde) qui permet d'atteindre ces objectifs individualisés. Le deuxième groupe en ligne n'a pas de structure de rencontre prédéterminée. Les échanges se déroulent au sein du forum, rattaché au site Web de la compagnie Weight Watchers Suisse, mais il est ouvert à toute personne désirant y adhérer librement, sans intervention du management. Le participant y recherche une forme d'appartenance tout en préservant sa singularité et sa liberté d'entrée et sortie (Cova 1997).

La compagnie Weight Watchers Suisse

Weight Watchers a été fondé en 1963 par Jean Nidtech. L'idée lui est venue quand elle a commencé à organiser des réunions hebdomadaires avec ses amies pour échanger leurs astuces pour perdre du poids. La première internationalisation de Weight Watchers a commencé en 1973.

Aujourd'hui, la compagnie est une société internationale présente dans la plus grande bourse mondiale ; le New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). C'est la plus grande et la plus connue des entreprises proposant des programmes commerciaux basés sur la perte de poids à travers le monde (Heyes 2006). Elle comporte plus de 1,5 millions de membres et opère dans plus de 30 pays (<http://www.weightwatchers.com>). En Suisse, le premier centre de rencontres a été créé à Genève en 1975. Aujourd'hui, Weight Watchers Suisse attire environ 30'000 membres qui se rassemblent dans 120 endroits. Il y a plus de 240 réunions hebdomadaires organisées

La société propose des services qui soutiennent son concept et de nombreux produits dérivés axés sur la perte de poids. L'objectif du programme est que chaque membre parvienne à un changement de mode de vie, en modifiant ses comportements alimentaires. La majorité de ses membres sont des femmes qui ont adopté une attitude « antirégime » (Spitzack 1990).

Les membres fixent leurs propres objectifs de perte de poids. À chaque aliment est attribué une valeur en points en fonction de son contenu de sucres, graisses, protéines et fibres. Les membres se voient alors attribuer un nombre de points maximum par semaine qu'ils doivent respecter par rapport à leur nourriture. Ils se réunissent dans des réunions hebdomadaires en échange d'une rémunération. Celles-ci sont très structurées, par exemple, tous les membres commencent la séance par se peser.

the biggest and most well known business that offers weight loss programs worldwide (Heyes 2006). It has around 1,5 millions members and operates in more than 30 countries (<http://www.weightwatchers.com>). The first Swiss meeting center was opened in 1975. Its Swiss branch has so far around 30'000 membres that meet in 120 centers where more than 240 weekly meetings take place.

The company offers products and services that support its weight loss method. The program's objective is that each member reaches a lifestyle change through changing her eating habits. Most members are females that have an « antidiét » attitude (Spitzack 1990).

Members set their own weight loss objectives. A points value is given to each food according to the sugars, fats and fibers it has. Members are given a weekly amount of points that they should respect while eating. Members pay a fee to attend the weekly meetings that are held in a structured way. For example all members start the meeting by weighing themselves. Then the group leader discusses the topic of the day whose flyer is handed to members at the beginning of the meeting. During the meeting, members can bring their contribution based on their personal experiences with the program. Then, the group leader rewards the successful members that have achieved a weight loss milestone (This could be losing 5% or 10% of their initial weight) by giving them small gifts such as a measuring tape or a keyring. The group leaders is a former members that have reached their ideal weight and have managed to stabilize it. They act as role models that motivate members to lose weight. Members need to fill a weekly journal with their daily food intake to manage their weekly points allowance. They also benefit from the group support that has therapeutic benefits to reduce the consequences of overweight stigma (Moisio & Beruchashvili 2010).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We gathered data in three complementary ways.

- The participant observation has allowed us to understand in a timely way, relationships between members as well as the rituals and habits of their interaction (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994). The objective was to become a full member and not to be an outsider despite the fact that this choice may lead to a loss of objectivity (Bastien 2007). Moreover, one of the authors has followed the Weight Watcher's program from January 2010 to November 2010 and participated to the weekly meetings. This has allowed us to understand, from an emic perspective, members' relationships within their communal environment.

Ensuite, le chef de groupe aborde le sujet du jour basé sur le document remis aux membres. Lors de la réunion, les membres peuvent apporter une contribution fondée sur leur expérience personnelle avec le régime. Ensuite, le chef de groupe offre des cadeaux de motivation, comme un mètre ou un porte-clés, aux membres qui ont fait une réalisation particulière, par exemple perdre 5% ou 10% de leur poids initial. Les chefs de groupe sont d'anciens membres de Weight Watchers qui ont atteint leur objectif de poids idéal et ont réussi à le stabiliser. Ils agissent comme modèles pour motiver les membres sur leur façon de perdre du poids. Afin d'améliorer leurs habitudes d'alimentation, les membres doivent être au courant de quoi et quand ils mangent. Ceci est mis en œuvre à travers le remplissage du carnet hebdomadaire de nourriture qui aide les membres à gérer leur dépense de points. Ils bénéficient également d'un soutien de groupe et l'utilisent comme une forme de thérapie pour atténuer les conséquences de la stigmatisation de l'excès de poids (Moisio et Beruchashvili 2010).

MÉTHODOLOGIE DE RECHERCHE

Le recueil des données s'est effectué selon trois méthodes complémentaires.

- Une observation participante nous a permis de comprendre en temps réel les relations entre les membres, les us et coutumes et les échanges d'idées (Atkinson et Hammersley 1994). Il s'agissait de se mettre à la place des membres et ne surtout pas être en retrait, même si cette posture conduit à une certaine perte d'objectivité (Bastien 2007). De plus, l'un des auteurs a suivi le programme de Weight Watchers de janvier 2010 à novembre 2010, en participant aux réunions hebdomadaires. Ceci a permis de comprendre, de manière éémique, les relations des membres dans leur environnement communautaire.
- De longs entretiens ont été conduits auprès de membres de la communauté en vue d'en induire les représentations sociales en matière de capital social (Bergadaà 2006). Cette méthode aborde la communauté du point de vue des individus, et permet de comprendre leurs expériences, leurs vies. Les personnes sont interrogées grâce à un guide d'entretien comprenant une quinzaine de questions ouvertes. Les répondants ont été identifiés selon leurs niveaux d'interaction avec les autres membres et dans la discussion générale. Le plus haut niveau d'interaction étant l'implication dans les discussions avec les autres membres et dans la discussion avec l'animatrice, le plus faible étant la non-implication avec les autres membres et la non-participation à la discussion générale. Ont ainsi été longuement interrogées en plusieurs fois :

- Long Interviews were conducted with community members in order to induce the social representations of social capital (Bergadaà 2006). This method tackles the community from an individual perspective and allows for an understanding of their experiences and their lives. We have used an interview guide that included fifteen open questions. We have selected respondents according to their level of interaction with other members and the group discussion. The highest level of interaction being the involvement in the discussion with other group members and with the group moderator. The lowest level of interaction was the non-involvement with other members and the non-participation to the discussion with the moderator. Hence, we interviewed thoroughly and many times: Karine, 67 years old, retired; Cécile, 27 years old, social educator; Karen, 20 years old, medical student; Susanne, 65 years old, administrative assistant; Florence, 35 years old, home manager.

- The netnography has allowed us to observe the interaction of members in real time and to understand their relationships within the online forum (Bernard 2004). The research process was conducted according the steps highlighted by Kozinets (2010): making an entrée within the community by registering in the French forum of Weight Watchers Switzerland, observing members on the forum to analyse their habits and rituals and finally, induce the relationships that build on the internet to understand how the community is formed and sustained. We have observed this community from April 2010 to April 2011. We have performed a systematic review of all the discussion threads and we have selected the twelve most relevant ones according to our research scheme that includes the six dimensions of social capital. Table 1 shows a detail of these discussion threads. Then, we have generated from each thread the significant messages and have proceeded to a validation of our results through going back and forth between the literature and the expressed significations (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Table 1 : Characteristics of discussion threads

| Discussion | Date | Number of exchanges | Titles of discussion threads |
|------------|------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | 06/01/2011 | 34 | Challenge de janvier ! |
| 2 | 08/01/2011 | 49 | Copine WW Sierre |
| 3 | 18/01/2011 | 16 | J'en peux plus |
| 4 | 02/02/2011 | 6 | Perte de motivation |
| 5 | 03/02/2011 | 11 | Formule pour calcul des upp |
| 6 | 07/02/2011 | 16 | Cherche une copinaute WW moi aussi |
| 7 | 12/03/2011 | 11 | 3mois à WW et 17kg en moins |
| 8 | 15/03/2011 | 21 | Nouvelle et déjà des questions... |
| 9 | 24/03/2011 | 38 | Cherche compagne de route WW |
| 10 | 25/03/2011 | 16 | Pas de perte de poids !!! |
| 11 | 31/03/2011 | 6 | Crainte de ne pas maigrir avec 29pts |
| 12 | 07/04/2011 | 14 | Nouvelle |

Karine, 67 ans, retraitée ; Cécile, 27 ans, éducatrice sociale ; Karen, 20 ans, étudiante en Médecine ; Susanne, 65 ans, secrétaire ; Florence, 35 ans, femme au foyer.

• La netnographie nous a permis d'observer l'interaction des membres en temps réel et de comprendre leurs relations sur le forum en ligne (Bernard 2004). Le processus s'est déroulé selon les étapes préconisées par Kozinets (2010) : effectuer son entrée au sein de la communauté en s'inscrivant sur le forum de la section française de Weight Watchers suisse, observer les membres sur le forum pour analyser leurs us et coutumes et, finalement, induire les relations qui se créent sur le web afin de comprendre comment la communauté se construit et perdure. Notre observation a été menée d'avril 2010 à avril 2011. Nous avons effectué une revue systématique de tous les fils de discussion et nous en avons sélectionné douze, les plus pertinents par rapport à notre grille de lecture en six dimensions du capital social. Le tableau 1 détaille ces fils de discussion. Nous avons ensuite extrait de chacun de ces fils les messages significatifs et procédé à la validation de nos propositions par des aller-retour entre la littérature et les signifiants exprimés (Glaser et Strauss 1967).

Tableau 1 : caractéristiques des fils de discussion

| Discussion | Date | Nombre d'échanges | Titres des fil de Discussion |
|------------|------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | 06/01/2011 | 34 | Challenge de janvier ! |
| 2 | 08/01/2011 | 49 | Copine WW Sierre |
| 3 | 18/01/2011 | 16 | J'en peux plus |
| 4 | 02/02/2011 | 6 | Perte de motivation |
| 5 | 03/02/2011 | 11 | Formule pour calcul des upp |
| 6 | 07/02/2011 | 16 | Cherche une copinaute WW moi aussi |
| 7 | 12/03/2011 | 11 | 3mois à WW et 17kg en moins |
| 8 | 15/03/2011 | 21 | Nouvelle et déjà des questions... |
| 9 | 24/03/2011 | 38 | Cherche compagne de route WW |
| 10 | 25/03/2011 | 16 | Pas de perte de poids !!! |
| 11 | 31/03/2011 | 6 | Crainte de ne pas maigrir avec 29pts |
| 12 | 07/04/2011 | 14 | Nouvelle |

RÉSULTATS

L'avantage d'avoir conduit des longs entretiens est qu'ils permettent de comprendre le « pourquoi » des faits que nous avons observés, soit lors des observations participantes, soit lors de la netnographie sur le forum. Il faut souligner que nous avons tout d'abord constaté que les membres de la communauté classique n'allaient pas sur le forum en ligne. Par contre, les membres actifs sur le forum avaient tous été un jour membres de la

RESULTS

The long interviews have the advantage to allow for an understanding of the roots of the facts that we have observed either during the participant observation or during the netnography on the forum. First, we have to highlight that the members of the face-to-face community did not go on the online forum. However, the active members of the forum have all been one day members of the traditional community where they have learnt the weight watchers' method. During the second analysis, we have noted that the verbatims from the interviews were either in line with the online exchanges that we analyzed or very different. After comparing this data, we realized that both weight watchers communities, offline and online, were similar regarding the first two dimensions of the community construct. However, there was a difference regarding the last four dynamic dimensions related to the nature of communication between members, which resulted in a different social capital.

Common Consciousness

The members of both communities are motivated by a common interest that revolves around weight loss. This dimension is tied to the main reason for which members get involved in the program: « It's really weight loss and unlike other diets Weight Watchers has the advantage of the group meetings... » (Cécile, 27 years old). The members' objective is to acquire a new lifestyle through change: « the objective is to really provide people with new habits » (Karen, 20 years old) or also: « It's not a diet, it's a way of functioning » (Florence, 35 years old). Hence, the members are tied, because they need each other. The discussion that follows shows that, on the forum, the common goal is also centered around this « new lifestyle »:

- Member A: « Good morning to all, I am Nini, I am 40 years old and will soon be 41, I am married and have 2 children that are 12 and 7 years old... If I come to you is to lose weight, a lot of weight! After a cancer and menopause treatments, here I am with 20 Kg more, that I can no longer stand, I can no longer find clothes my size, I cannot see a picture of me, I am ashamed of who I became, thus it's time to do something about it! This is why I come to you, because I cannot do it by myself! Thanks and see you soon. »

- Member B: « Welcome Nini we are all here to help you hang in there!! Kisses ».

The ritualisation

Both « communities » have specific rituals and traditions. In the « off-line » group, the meetings

communauté classique où ils avaient appris la méthode Weight Watchers. En seconde analyse, nous avons relevé que, soit les verbatim issus des interviews allaient dans le sens des échanges analysés par la netnographie, soit au contraire ils s'en distinguaient nettement. En comparant ces données, nous avons donc constaté que les deux communautés Weight Watchers, classique et en ligne, ne se différençaient pas sur les deux premières dimensions constitutives du construit de communauté, mais voyaient la nature de la communication entre membres générer un capital social de nature différente sur les quatre dimensions dynamiques de celui-ci.

La conscience commune

Les membres des deux communautés ont une motivation et un intérêt collectif centré autour de la perte de poids. Cette dimension est liée à la raison principale pour laquelle tous les membres sont impliqués dans le programme : « C'est vraiment la perte de poids et contrairement à d'autres régimes l'avantage de Weight Watchers c'est le fait d'avoir le groupe... » (Cécile, 27 ans). L'objectif des membres est d'atteindre un nouveau style de vie en adoptant un changement de mode de vie : « le but c'est vraiment de donner des habitudes de vie aux gens » (Karen, 20 ans) ou encore : « ce n'est pas un régime, c'est un fonctionnement » (Florence, 35 ans). Les membres sont donc liés, car ils ont besoin les uns des autres. La discussion qui suit montre que, sur le forum, le but commun est également focalisé sur ce « nouveau style de vie » :

- Membre A : « Bonjour à toutes et tous, moi c'est Nini, j'ai 40 ans bientôt 41, suis mariée, 2 enfants de 12 et 7 ans... Si je viens vers vous, c'est pour perdre du poids beaucoup de poids! suite à un cancer, les traitements et la ménopause me voila rendue avec 20 kg en trop, que je ne supporte plus, je n'arrive plus à m'habiller, ne peux plus me voir en photo, et j'ai honte de ce que je suis devenue donc il est temps que je me bouge! Voilà pourquoi je viens vers vous, car seule je n'y arriverais pas! merci et à très vite. »

- Membre B : « Bienvenue à toi Nini on est toutes là pour t'aider et je te souhaite plein de courage et d'énergie!! Bises ».

La ritualisation

Les deux « communautés » présentent des rituels et des traditions spécifiques. Dans le groupe classique « off-line », les réunions sont structurées, préparées et dirigées par un leader institutionnel. Durant un an d'observation, chaque réunion a été conduite identiquement :

are structured prepared and moderated by an institutional leader. During our year of observation, all the meetings were conducted in an identical way: the members start by weighing themselves and paying their membership fees, then they sit around the formal leader that discusses the topic of the meeting. The facilitator then ask members about their experience and opens the door for advice and tips sharing to reach the ideal weight. He/she congratulates, encourages and rewards the people that have progressed in terms of weight loss. Before closing the meeting, the leader shows the overall weight loss of the group. Finally the members are given some time to ask questions before splitting. During this free time, members share a common language related to the weight watchers program, they rarely go beyond in terms of interaction: « We have common codes: calculating the points... a banana is 0, a pear is 0 and a piece of bread is between 3 and 6 » (Cécile, 27 years old). The tone and the relationships created during the meetings remain quite formal. We did not manage to observe warm or friendly exchanges between members.

The online forum also presents a more flexible ritualisation. It is open to any web surfer to interact with no time constraint, or obligation. However, similarly to the meetings, members use terminology related to the Weight Watchers' program (points) and are also informal. Rituals of encouragement, compassion and orientation of other members take place. Hence, the discussion threads generate free interactions with varying numbers of replies. Nobody feels obligated to get involved in all topics nor manages the debate in an authoritarian way. Nobody deviates from the central topic of the discussion. If needed, they open a new discussion thread with a new topic and invite members to it.

The participant's voluntarism

This dimension clearly distinguishes both communities from each other. Hence, none of the members that went through our in depth interviews saw themselves as active. Those that do it are uncomfortable to use the term « community »: « A community implies members that are more active than the ones in Weight Watchers. Here, nobody brings a piece of themselves » (Suzanne, 65 years old). The participant observation has allowed us to understand that what prevents members' engagement is the directorship of the Weight Watchers' trained leader. The facilitator, who is a former member of the program, replicates the system and sustains the inflexibility of the meeting and the interaction's structure. The members cannot express themselves or act freely, they have a formal tone.

les personnes commencent par se peser et par payer la cotisation, puis elles s'assoient en rond et elles écoutent le leader formel parler du sujet de la réunion. Ce dernier interroge les membres sur leurs expériences et autorise un partage de conseils et d'astuces en vue d'atteindre un poids idéal. Il félicite, encourage et récompense les personnes ayant progressé dans leur perte de poids. Avant de clore la réunion, le leader montre la réalisation globale du groupe en matière de perte de poids. Finalement, les membres ont un laps de temps libre pour poser des questions avant de se quitter. Durant ces temps libres les membres partagent un langage commun lié au programme Weight Watchers, ils ne vont guère au-delà en termes d'interaction : « Il y a des codes communs entre nous : le calcul des points ... une banane c'est 0, une poire c'est 0 et un morceau de pain c'est entre 3 et 6 » (Cécile, 27 ans). Le ton et les relations qui se créent au sein des réunions restent formels et, durant notre observation, nous n'avons pas observé d'échanges chaleureux ou amicaux entre membres.

Le forum en ligne présente également une forme de ritualisation, quoique beaucoup plus flexible. Il est ouvert à tout internaute, et chacun peut interagir sans contrainte temporelle, ni obligation. Cependant, tout comme dans les réunions, les membres utilisent les codes de langage du programme Weight Watchers (les points) et ils se tutoient. Des rituels d'encouragement, de compassion et d'orientation des autres s'instaurent. Ainsi, les fils de discussion génèrent des interactions libres avec un nombre d'intervenants très variable. Personne ne se sent obligé d'intervenir sur tous les sujets ou ne guide le débat autoritairement. Aucun ne dévie du fil central de la discussion, préférant au besoin lancer un fil parallèle ou inviter les internautes à participer à un autre fil existant avec un autre thème en débat.

Le volontarisme de l'acteur

Cette dimension distingue clairement les deux communautés. Ains, aucun des membres interviewés en profondeur ne s'y voit comme actif, et ceux qui le sont de fait sont réticents à utiliser le terme « communauté » : « Une communauté impliquerait que les communautaires soient beaucoup plus actifs que les gens le sont chez Weight Watchers. Ici, personne n'apporte quelque chose de lui-même » (Suzanne, 65 ans). L'observation participante nous a permis de comprendre que le frein à l'engagement des membres est dû à la directivité du leader formé par la compagnie Weight Watchers. Ce dernier, ancien membre reproduit le système et valorise la rigidité de la structuration des réunions et des interactions.

On the other hand, the observation of the forum shows that members are highly and willingly involved with each other. For example, if one of the members is facing a day-to-day problem, many members rush to help them out within the same day.

- Member F: Good morning. I would like to know if a 14 year old teenager can follow the ww program thanks.

- Member G: I am not sure that its possible because the food intake is totally different for teenagers especially at 14 years old WW does not register members before 18 years so its impossible to have the number of ... if you are online, in the search field on top of this page, type teenager and you will have advice otherwise let us know and we will try to find a solution

The most active members seem to always be ready to give their time to encourage and provide advice to others so that they become acquainted with information search and finding solutions:

- Member H: Good morning to all. I am new since yesterday and a total beginner. I would like to lose 13 kg... Need support, motivation and recipe ideas...

- Member D: Good morning! You will have no problem finding support and motivation on the forums! As for recipes, type DEM in «search» on the "journal de bord" and you will have menu ideas to start with, same for recipes! If you have other questions, do not hesitate, have a good day

- Member I: Hello ! I am also a former member who recently came back. After having my second baby, I feel its time to restart the weight loss. I wish you a good and fast weight loss. I have lost 8 kg last year in about 4 months, it has transformed my morale and my body! You will see, you will find everything you are looking for on the website: help, advice, recipes, tools, the site is very well done. Hang in there, but don't worry it's often «easier» than we think. Most importantly, enjoy cooking and eating, it's important! Keep me posted regularly if you want! See you soon.

The voluntarism is portrayed through responses of encouragement, help, sympathy and support. This shows the high development of social relationships that comes from the improvement in communication within the internet (Howard et al. 2001). This confirms Rebillard's (2007) statement: if the members are all at the same level within a communitarian group, they have more willingness to get involved within the community.

Oriented Altruism

Both communities are also different in terms of this dimension. The respondents of the weekly meetings

Les membres ne peuvent pas s'exprimer ou agir librement, et ils adoptent un ton formalisé.

A contrario, l'observation du forum indique que les membres sont très engagés volontairement les uns envers les autres. Par exemple, si l'un des membres indique qu'il rencontre un problème lié à sa vie quotidienne, plusieurs membres s'empressent de l'orienter dans la journée même.

- Membre F : Bonjour je voudrais savoir si une ado de 14 ans peut suivre ww merci.

- Membre G : Je ne suis pas sûre que cela soit possible, car les quantités sont totalement différentes chez les ados surtout à 14 ans WW ne prend pas d'inscriptions avant 18 ans donc impossible d'avoir le nombre de... Si tu es on-line, dans la case rechercher, en haut de cette page, tape adolescent et tu auras des conseils sinon dis-le et on essaiera de trouver une solution

Les plus actifs semblent toujours prêts à donner de leur temps pour encourager et conseiller les autres à se familiariser avec la recherche d'informations et de solutions :

- Membre H : Bonjour à toutes et tous. Je suis nouvelle depuis hier et complètement novice. Je souhaiterais perdre presque 13 kg..... Besoin de soutien, motivation, idées recettes.....

- Membre D : bonjour! soutien et motivation, tu trouveras sur les forums aucun problème! pour les recettes, tu tapes DEM dans "chercher" sur le journal de bord et tu auras des idées de menus pour démarrer , idem pour des recettes! si tu as d'autres questions, n'hésites pas bonne journée

- Membre I : Coucou ! moi aussi, re-nouvelle. Après Bébé 2, il est temps de m'y remettre. Je te souhaite de perdre vite, et surtout bien, tes kilos. Moi l'année dernière, j'ai perdu 8 kilos en 4 mois environ, ça m'a transformée, moralement, physiquement ! Tu verras, tu trouveras tout ce que tu cherches sur le site : aide, conseils, recettes, outils, c'est super bien fait. Je te souhaite bon courage, mais rassure toi, c'est souvent plus "facile" qu'on ne le pense. Surtout, prends plaisir à cuisiner et à manger, c'est important ! Donne-moi de tes nouvelles au fur et à mesure si tu veux ! A bientôt.

Le volontarisme se traduit là par des réponses encourageantes, de l'aide, de la sympathie et du soutien. Cela dénote bien du développement accru des relations sociales issu de l'amélioration de la communication au sein du web (Howard et al. 2001). Ceci confirme la thèse de Rebillard (2007) : si les membres sont tous au même rang dans un groupe communautaire, ils ont plus de volonté à s'investir pour la communauté.

sense its commercial character: « We pay to be able to participate, we pay in exchange of a service which means that we expect the support and follow up to be able to lose weight and we can decide to stop going to the meetings anytime. » (Cécile, 27 years old). Their (potential) altruism stems from an individualistic objective (losing weight for me), but still depends on the group whose function is to bind individual wills. When asked about this, a participant said: « I have witnessed here that the environment is very individualistic, people come to take and not necessarily give much » (Karine, 67 ans).

On the other hand, altruism stands out more in the online Weight Watchers community. In fact, the need for others as well as giving to others seems to happen naturally: there is no institutional leader. The motivation and actions of the volunteers are the main foundation for reaching the common goal. Hence, the internet reinforces individual engagement towards the cause of the weight watchers' community. They follow the same objective in an altruistic way and while doing that they build real relationships: « It is good that we are able to discuss our weight issues and feel heard and understood. We really feel good because our husbands and our friends are not attentive to this issue » (Maria).

Reciprocity norms

Within the offline Weight Watchers community, members adopt an individualistic position. They participate, and have a low involvement and hence do not show reciprocity: « There is no real integration, because we do not socialize... each person talks separately and after we do not keep in touch. » (Karine, 67 ans). This lack of engagement blocks social capital creation: « each works for their own sake of losing weight » (Karen, 20 ans). During the meetings, the only people that provide advice to others are the ones appointed by the group moderator: « The moderator... is the one who tries to understand and manage the situation for each person » (Florence, 35 ans). This is done through Q and A, which does not leave room for reciprocity. In fact, none of the members interviewed talked about reciprocity.

Contrarily, the Weight Watchers forum, is an environment of sharing and social ties creation. The members can get the information that they seek by simply searching the forum. They can also offer their advice freely and with no constraint. The netnography shows that the community members take the risk to give their point of view to strangers.

- Member C: Hello, I have started WW last week and I feel a bit lonely. I tough I had an online coach, but I don't. There are many posts but I would like to

Un altruisme orienté

Sur cette dimension également les deux communautés se différencient. Les répondants des réunions hebdomadaires en considèrent le caractère commercial : « On paie pour pouvoir y participer, on paie en échange d'un service c'est-à-dire qu'on attend un soutien et un accompagnement pour pouvoir perdre du poids et du jour au lendemain on peut se dire je n'y vais plus. » (Cécile, 27 ans). Leur altruisme (éventuel) est assujéti à un objectif individualiste (maigrir pour soi), mais qui reste dépendant du groupe, dont la fonction est de consolider la volonté de chacun. Interrogée à ce propos, une participante nous dit : « De ce que j'ai vu c'est chacun pour soi, je vais et je profite sans forcément donner beaucoup » (Karine, 67 ans).

A contrario, l'altruisme est développé dans la communauté en ligne Weight Watchers. En effet, le besoin des autres, tout comme le don aux autres, semble naturel : il n'y a pas de leader institutionnel, et tout repose sur les motivations et sur les actions bénévoles de volontaires dans l'accomplissement de leur objectif commun. Le web renforcerait donc l'engagement des individus dans la cause que défend la communauté Weight Watchers. De ce fait, ils poursuivent le même objectif de manière altruiste en créant de véritables relations : « Ce qui est bien, c'est que nous pouvons discuter de nos problèmes de poids et que nous sommes écoutés et compris. On se sent vraiment bien parce que nos maris et nos amis ne sont pas vraiment à l'écoute » (Maria).

Les normes de réciprocité

Dans la communauté classique Weight Watchers, les membres campent sur une position individualiste. Ils participent et s'investissent très peu et n'ont dès lors pas de réflexe de réciprocité : « Il n'y a pas vraiment d'intégration, parce qu'on ne discute pas... Chacun parle de son côté et après on n'a plus de contact. » (Karine, 67 ans). Ce manque d'engagement freine la création de capital social : « chacun travaille pour lui en l'occurrence pour essayer de perdre son poids » (Karen, 20 ans). Durant les réunions, seules les personnes désignées par l'animatrice offrent des conseils aux autres : « C'est l'animatrice... qui essaie de comprendre et de gérer la situation pour chacun » (Florence, 35 ans). Et, puisqu'elles répondent à une sollicitation, aucune n'a parlé de réciprocité dans les interviews.

Tout à l'opposé, le forum Weight Watchers, offre un espace de partage et de création de liens sociaux. Les membres peuvent obtenir les informations qu'ils souhaitent avec une simple recherche sur le forum. Ils peuvent aussi offrir leurs conseils de manière libre et sans contrainte. La netnographie nous montre que les membres de la communauté

be part of a team, have a follow up in my diet, the questions...

- Member D: Hello ! Of course there is friendship as well! Just read! and get involved in the discussions that fit you best! Introduce yourself talk about your aspirations! Ask questions! You will always find somebody to help you! There are big experts on this forum... there are also the ones who want to discuss things other than the program... I wish you lots of good things and success in your program!

- Member C: ...You are right, the forum is here for not being alone!

- Member E : Hello come join the thread the winners 100 percent we come there every day to discuss all sorts of topics, to support each other and to talk about cooking... you are welcome there.

Hence, members' ideas become a flow of information with which members can interact freely. The members join and get involved in this forum naturally and are engaged through the reciprocity of exchanges. The anonymity of exchanges gives members the possibility to open up on every day life topics that would not have been shared in a face-to-face discussion. It supports the burgeoning of a culture that is specific to the group. The online community becomes a buffer allowing the building of new social relationships (Kraut et al. 2002).

Social trust

This dimension is necessary to the development of a strong social capital and is expressed differently in both communities. It cannot flourish in the offline community, because the moderator is the main focus of the meeting: « When the weekly results are good, the leader as well as the members celebrate the progress through gifts, smiles, praise, and applause » (Karen, 20 ans). The members can also offer advice on how to overcome weight loss obstacles to members who had a bad week: « ... It's true that there is support either through the moderator when there are questions or such things she asks questions and we can share our experience with others » (Susanne, 65 ans). The leader often answers and gives her own experience to build trust around her. We have noted that this sometimes blocks members that want to contribute by giving a personal answer. The leader does not play the facilitator role but is more like an instructor that controls communication.

On the other hand, members of the online community show a great deal of social trust. The face-to-face community members discuss neutral topics (weather, mood, eating) at the beginning and

online prennent le risque de donner leur avis à des gens qu'ils ne connaissent pas.

- Membre C : Bonjour, J'ai démarré WW la semaine dernière et je me sens un peu seule. Je pensais avoir un coach en ligne, ce n'est pas le cas. Certes beaucoup de postes, mais j'aimerais faire parti d'une équipe, avoir un suivi dans le régime, les questions...

- Membre D : Bonjour ! Bien sûr que l'amitié existe ici aussi ! il te suffit de lire ! et d'entrer dans la conversation qui te sied le mieux ! Tu te présentes tu parles de tes aspirations !tu poses tes questions !tu trouveras toujours qu'un pour t'aider ! sur ce forum il y a de grandes expertes ... et puis il y a aussi celles qui ont envie de parler d'autres choses que de programme ... je te souhaite plein de bonnes choses dont la réussite dans ton programme !

- Membre C : ...Tu as raison, le forum est là pour ça : ne pas rester seule !

- Membre E : salut je t'invite à venir sur notre post les gagnantes 100% on y vient tous les jours se parler de tout et rien, se soutenir, parler de nos menus ... Tu es la bienvenue.

Ainsi, les idées offertes par les membres actifs deviennent un flux d'informations au sein duquel chacun peut interagir librement. Les membres apparaissent et s'investissent sur ce forum de manière naturelle et ils sont aussitôt engagés par la réciprocité des échanges. Le forum, par son caractère anonyme, offre aussi à ses membres la possibilité de s'ouvrir aussi sur des sujets de la vie de tous les jours qui auraient été contenus en face à face. Il supporte ainsi l'émergence d'une culture propre au groupe. La communauté virtuelle devient un catalyseur permettant la construction de nouveaux rapports sociaux (Kraut et al. 2002).

La confiance sociale

Dimension essentielle au développement d'un capital social fort, la confiance entre membres distingue aussi clairement les deux communautés. Elle ne peut s'épanouir dans la communauté classique, puisque tout le focus est mis sur l'animateur : « Quand nous avons une bonne semaine, le chef de file ainsi que les membres célèbrent les progrès par des cadeaux, des sourires, des félicitations et des applaudissements » (Karen, 20 ans). Les membres peuvent aussi offrir des conseils sur la façon de surmonter les obstacles à la perte de poids à quelqu'un qui aurait passé une mauvaise semaine : « ... C'est vrai qu'il y a un soutien soit par le biais de l'animatrice quand il y a des questions ou des choses comme cela elles nous réinterrogent et on peut donner notre témoignage par rapport aux autres » (Susanne, 65 ans). Pour centraliser la confiance sur lui, et non sur les membres,

end of the session, while members of the forum get into topics that are more personal such as childhood, the relationship with their spouse or their children. Many members give social support to others with no assurance that they will get help back. Some post messages when they are facing tough times and get many messages of encouragements, for example:

- Member J: Good evening, I come to you because I am a bit lost. I have been following the pro-points program for several months now and did not get any results; I did not lose any weight. It is not the program's fault but mine; because I overeat regularly and it's becoming more frequent because I am tired of fighting... can you help me?

- Member K: Good morning J, its already great that you stopped smoking, bravo! Maybe it's too much for your body to do both things at the same time. Wait, a little bit more, if you can, for your body to desintoxicate before doing WW... I have also stopped smoking and started WW at the same time, 2 and a half years ago and I have strong urges for smoking:0/. Can you imagine how aggressive it is for your body, it is deprived from all the drugs it likes, oops... this is probably why you cannot make it. What do you think?

- Member L: hello J, congratulations for how you handled the weekend... this proves that you are strong and most of all capable of doing it. Congratulations as well for stopping smoking... I am not there yet... I think that I should first do one thing at the time and I chose to lose weight first and then, we will see for smoking... There's still a long way to go :/

We were surprised to notice that the members of the online community physically meet as they build ties with each other: « I met few members of the forum. Last Friday, we went to Lavey to eat a little something with Lisa and Mary. It was nice for us to do it once more. I also met two other nice ladies on the forum! » (member M). The social trust is part of the online forum and leads members to give their personal time and make themselves available to support others. Its surprising to see that an organization such as Weight Watchers, that is usually very precise in communication during weekly meetings allows the development of parallel communities (online first that later extends to real life) with no control.

DISCUSSION

The objective of our research is to explore how a company can manage a strong social capital based on the communication from a face-to-face community and from an online community. Our research shows that both Weight Watchers communities that we researched share the same

le leader répond souvent en mettant en exergue son vécu personnel. Nous avons noté qu'il freine parfois les membres désirant contribuer par une réponse personnelle. Le leader n'a pas le rôle d'un facilitateur, mais celui d'un instructeur qui conserve toujours le contrôle de la communication.

A contrario, les membres de la communauté en ligne font preuve d'une grande confiance sociale. Alors que les membres de la communauté face à face discutent en début et fin de séances de sujets neutres (le temps, l'humeur, leur semaine en alimentation), les membres du forum abordent des sujets à caractère plus personnels tels que l'enfance, la relation à leur partenaire ou à leurs enfants. Plusieurs membres s'engagent à donner du support social aux autres membres sans aucune garantie de recevoir de l'aide en retour. Certains postent des messages en ligne lorsqu'ils sont confrontés à des moments difficiles et reçoivent plusieurs réponses encourageantes, par exemple :

- Membre J : Bonsoir, je viens vers vous, car je suis un peu perdue. Voilà plusieurs mois que je suis le programme pro-points et aucun résultat, je suis toujours au même poids. Ce n'est pas de la faute du programme, mais de la mienne, car je craque régulièrement et c'est de plus en plus fréquent, car je suis fatiguée de me battre... pouvez-vous m'aider ?
- Membre K : Bonjour J, alors déjà c'est super d'avoir arrêté de fumer, bravo! Peut-être cela fait trop pour ton corps de faire les deux en même temps. Attends, si tu y arrives, encore un peu avant de faire WW que ton corps se détouille... J'ai comme toi arrêté en même temps que j'ai commencé WW, il y a 2ans 1/2 et j'ai toujours de fortes envies de clope :O/. Imagine l'agression pour ton corps, il est privé de toutes les drogues qu'il aime, gloups...c'est sûrement pour cela que tu n'y arrives plus. Tu en penses quoi?
- Membre L: salut J, félicitations pour ta gestion du week-end ... ça prouve que tu es forte et surtout capable de le faire. Félicitations aussi pour l'arrêt de la fumée ... Je n'en suis pas encore là ... Je pense d'abord, pour ma part, qu'il faut que je fasse une chose à la fois et j'ai choisi de perdre d'abord du poids et ensuite, on verra pour la cigarette ... C'est pas gagné :/

Nous avons été surpris de constater que les membres de la communauté en ligne se voient dans la vie quotidienne, car des liens se créent entre eux : « J'ai rencontré quelques membres du forum. Vendredi dernier, nous sommes allés à Lavey pour manger un petit quelque chose avec Lisa et Mary. C'était vraiment agréable pour nous de le refaire. J'ai aussi rencontré deux autres dames très agréables

passion, the same destiny and revolve around the same brand. However, they do not generate a social capital of similar nature nor intensity.

Table 2: Comparison of social capital dimensions of both communities

| Dimensions of W.W's social capital | Off-line | On-line |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Common consciousness | Community of a destiny: weight loss | Community of a destiny: weight loss |
| 2. Ritualisation | Instaured by the meeting moderator and is a point of reference for members. | Each contributes freely |
| 3. The participant's voluntarism | Low occurrence, members based on the prompting of the moderator. | Basis of the members' interaction, encouragement, sympathy, cohesion, team spirit brought forward by the forum. |
| 4. Oriented altruism | Determined by a pragmatic individualism | Favoring mutual encouragement, compassion and care. |
| 5. Reciprocity norms | We did not observe spontaneous reciprocity the exchange remains functional. | Prompt to opening on everyday life topics to help others. |
| 6. Social trust | Trust induced by the WW appointed leader that often based on personal experience. | Strong trust due to the anonymity of the forum, which allows members to express themselves without fearing to be judged. |

Hence, both communities are complementary and sometimes opposed when it comes to the structuring dimensions of the social capital of the Weight Watchers Switzerland brand. Most of the authors see that communication generates a strong social capital in the face-to-face context where interactions happen on a regular basis. (Wasko & Faraj 2005; Constant et al. 1996 ; Kraut et al. 1987). This is not what we observed in the case of Weight Watchers. The face-to-face environment is so structured that it does not allow members to take the initiative to support others, and show altruism only upon the request of the group moderator. Within this offline community, members are driven by a predominant individualism. They do not take the risk to offer support and their moral support remains artificial. Voluntarism and reciprocity are limited; because members are put in a receiver position and are the customers of Weight Watchers. However, the online community is filled with voluntarism where members come to find a spontaneous and natural help, which naturally leads to oriented altruism and reciprocity. Finally, we observed social trust in both communities. In the face-to-face community this did not happen between members but driven and channeled towards the group moderator.

Our netnographic research of the online forum allowed us to see that each request by a new member generates listening, advice, and a sharing of personal experience. There are some rituals, however, they are less formal than the offline community. The social trust is not based on physical proximity; rather it relies on the freedom of members to show realtime cooperation. This is not in line with the statement of Wasko & Faraj (2005) that say that members should share a common history to build a real social capital. However, there is no history on the Web but a series of spontaneous messages in

sur le forum ! » (membre M). La confiance sociale inhérente au forum en ligne conduit les membres à donner de leur temps personnel et à se rendre disponible afin de soutenir les autres. Il est étrange de voir qu'une organisation telle que Weight Watchers, ayant toujours une si grande précision dans la communication au sein des réunions classiques, laisse se développer des communautés parallèles sans aucun contrôle, en ligne d'abord puis par extension dans la vie réelle.

DISCUSSION

L'objectif de notre recherche était d'explorer comment une entreprise pouvait générer un fort capital social en s'appuyant sur la communication émanant, d'une part d'une communauté classique et, d'autre part, d'une communauté en ligne. Notre recherche indique que les deux communautés étudiées au sein de l'organisation Weight Watchers partagent la même passion, le même destin et se forment autour de la même marque. Cependant, elles ne génèrent pas un capital social de même nature, ni de même intensité.

Tableau 2 : Comparaison des deux communautés sur les dimensions du capital social

| Dimensions du capital social de W.W. | Off-line | On-line |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. Une conscience commune | Communauté d'un destin : la perte de poids | Communauté d'un destin : la perte de poids |
| 2. La ritualisation | Instaurée par l'animateur de réunion et chacun s'y réfère | Chacun intervient librement s'il se sent utile. |
| 3. Le volontarisme de l'acteur | Peu présent, chacun intervenant selon la demande de l'animateur. | Fondement de l'échange, encouragement, sympathie, cohésion, esprit d'équipe étant mis en exergue par le forum. |
| 4. Un altruisme orienté | Déterminé par un individualisme pragmatique. | Encouragement réciproque, compassion et care sont favorisés. |
| 5. Des normes de réciprocités | Pas de réflexe de réciprocité observé l'échange reste fonctionnel. | Incitation à s'ouvrir sur des sujets de la vie quotidienne pour aider l'autre. |
| 6. La confiance sociale | Confiance canalisée par le leader officiel qui se fonde souvent sur son histoire personnelle. | Confiance a priori d'autant plus forte que le forum est anonyme donc tout peut être exprimé sans crainte de jugement de valeur. |

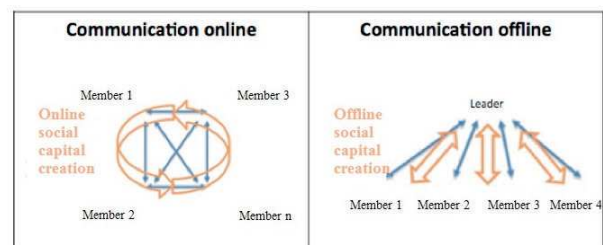
Ainsi, les deux communautés sont-elles pour le moins complémentaires et parfois opposées sur les dimensions qui structurent le capital social de la marque Weight Watchers Suisse. La majorité des auteurs considère que la communication, dans un contexte de face à face où les interactions se font de manière régulière, est plus apte à générer un fort capital social (Wasko et Faraj 2005 ; Constant et al. 1996 ; Kraut et al. 1987). Ce n'est pas ce que nous avons constaté dans le cas de Weight Watchers. Au contraire, l'environnement en face à face est si structuré qu'il ne permet pas aux membres de prendre l'initiative de soutenir les autres, ni de faire preuve d'altruisme, hors des moments où l'animatrice les sollicite.

a constantly renovated present. If we consider what Amado & Guittet (2009) said that « communication is a continuous process of social relationships », then both communication models should reinforce each other (Howard et al. 2001).

If our results regarding social capitals were validated, then other companies would be able to help managers reinforce their brand communities or also avoid consumer disengagement. This is easier in cases like Weight Watchers where the brand has a strong and established brand equity. Still, we are left to see whether a company whose brand equity is weaker would be able to develop trust on the web (Lemoine 2011). In fact, even within the forum, the participants discuss their relationship with the Weight Watchers' program.

In any case, nowadays, brands build and sustain themselves in two different environments that cannot be separated. They intrinsically generate social capital through two communication tools: the real and the virtual. Yet, there are some brands that only have an online presence, and not all the off-line brands hold weekly meeting nor regular consumer focus groups. Nonetheless, we found the Weight Watchers example to be a good source of thinking and the six dimensions that allowed us to structure our observations can also be the organizing scheme of components of new jobs of e-marketing. Our future research would seek to find which forms and which attributions would make the job of « e-community manager » a developer of social capital and not a trends finder like it's generally the case today. Hence, if we apply both these communication models (see figure 1), they should work in synergy to help generate and strengthen social capital.

Figure 1 : Emergence of social capital of Weight Watchers Switzerland



Weight watchers has been so successful for the past decades because its members need its codes, rites and its mode of leadership. One should seek to use this online brand capital for the common good of the members. While social trust revolves around the institutional leader, the online community is a environment of natural trust. Both these groups, one directed and the other free, result in two types of leadership where leaders are able to influence each

Dans cette communauté off-line, les membres sont animés par un individualisme prépondérant. Ils ne se risquent pas à offrir un soutien et leur support moral reste artificiel. Volontarisme et réciprocité y sont limités, car les membres sont placés en position d'attentisme et ne sont que des clients de Weight Watchers. Au contraire, dans la communauté en ligne, le volontarisme régit ce groupe où les membres viennent y trouver une aide spontanée et naturelle. Altruisme orienté et réciprocité s'ensuivent naturellement. Finalement, la confiance sociale existe dans les deux communautés, mais elle ne se situe pas entre membres dans la communauté en face à face, car elle est canalisée par, et vers, l'animatrice.

Notre étude netnographique sur le forum en ligne nous a permis de constater que chaque sollicitation de nouveau membre a pour écho de l'écoute, des conseils, et un partage de vécu personnel. Si une forme de ritualisation s'y manifeste, c'est de manière nettement moins formelle que dans la communauté off-line. La confiance sociale n'y est pas fondée sur la proximité physique, mais sur la liberté des membres à faire preuve de coopération en temps réel. Ceci va à l'encontre des propositions de Wasko et Faraj (2005) pour qui les membres doivent partager un historique commun pour développer un véritable capital social. Or, il n'y a pas, sur le Web, d'histoire, mais une succession de messages spontanés dans un présent toujours renouvelé. En considérant avec Amado et Guittet (2009) que « la communication relève d'un processus continu de construction des relations sociales », les deux modèles de communication distincts devraient alors mutuellement se renforcer (Howard et al. 2001).

Nos résultats, s'ils étaient validés par rapport aux capitaux sociaux d'autres entreprises pourraient aider les managers à renforcer leurs communautés de marque ou encore à éviter un désengagement des consommateurs. Ceci est d'autant plus facile si l'on a déjà une marque avec un fort capital de marque déjà bien établi comme Weight Watchers. La question demeure de savoir si une entreprise avec un capital de marque plus faible réussirait à développer une confiance sur la toile (Lemoine 2011). En effet, même sur le forum, les internautes parlent de leurs relations au programme Weight Watchers.

Quoi qu'il en soit les marques aujourd'hui se construisent et perdurent dans deux univers différents et génèrent intrinsèquement du capital social à travers deux outils de communication bien distincts : le réel et le virtuel. Les dissocier semblerait illusoire.

member and sometimes the whole group as they manage social relationships (Moscovici 1988). In the case of the offline community, the leader instills a hierarchical structure of communication, which impacts the ties within the group (Amado & Guittet 2009). On the other hand, the online community generates an emerging leadership that strengthens the brand capital in a natural way (Mongeau & Saint-Charles 2005). The altruism of these « e-leaders » supports the motivation of members and influences them to reach a common goal. They do not seek to control the group but simply believe in the just and useful « cause ». The communication between members of the online community is hence more intimate which results in closeness and sympathy (Sias & Cahill 1998 ; Keyton 1999). Further research can observe the emergence of natural leaders within an online group . Acquiring a deeper understanding of their characteristics can enable their support and hence have a positive impact on social capital.

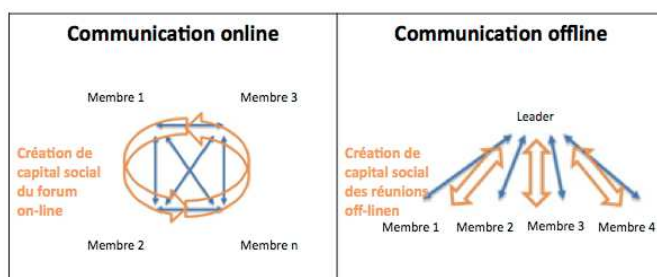
However, new questions arise as brands would usually seek to put in place their own « e-leaders », generators of social capital. As the internet allows for anonymity, they would be able to enter a brand community through a forum such as the one we have researched or through creating a specific group on the internet through one of the current social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn.... The ethical issue arises when the « e-community manager » (that can direct many « e-leaders » and be one of them) would collect and interpret data through a « discrete » observation of members' behavior. In this case, wouldn't there be an ethical issue towards members especially that trust is one the fundamental dimensions of the brand's social capital?

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Certes il existe des marques uniquement en ligne et toutes les marques off-line n'ont pas des réunions ou groupe de focus réguliers de leurs consommateurs. Néanmoins, l'exemple de Weight Watchers nous semble d'autant plus utile à la réflexion que les six dimensions qui nous ont permis de structurer nos observations peuvent également organiser les composantes de nouveaux métiers du e-marketing. Une phase ultérieure de notre recherche serait bien évidemment de savoir quelle forme et quelles attributions associeraient ce métier de « e-community manager » comme développeur de capital social, et non comme chasseur de tendances comme on le conçoit encore généralement aujourd'hui. Ainsi, ces deux modèles de communication (voir figure 1), s'ils sont appliqués conjointement, devraient agir en synergie pour aider à l'émergence et à la consolidation d'un capital social.

Figure 1 : Emergence du capital social de Weight Watchers suisse



Si Weight Watchers connaît ce succès depuis des décennies, c'est bien parce que les membres ont besoin de ses codes, de ses rites et de son mode de leadership. La question est donc de savoir comment instrumenter ce capital de marque sur l'Internet pour le bien collectif des membres. Si la confiance sociale s'organise autour du leader institutionnel, la communauté en ligne, en revanche, est un espace de confiance spontané. Ces deux types d'organisation, l'une dirigée et l'autre libre, appellent deux types de leadership. Certes, le leader a la capacité d'influencer chacun des membres, voire même le groupe entier, car il régit les rapports sociaux (Moscovici 1988). Il inscrit son action dans une hiérarchisation de la communication qui affecte les liens au sein du groupe (Amado et Guittet 2009). Par contre, la communauté en ligne génère un leadership de type émergent qui peut renforcer le capital de marque naturellement (Mongeau et Saint-Charles 2005). L'altruisme de ces « e-leaders » est le support de la motivation et de l'influence des membres à atteindre un but collectif. Ils ne cherchent pas à vouloir contrôler le groupe, mais croient simplement la « cause » juste et utile.

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La communication entre les membres de la communauté en ligne devient dès lors plus intime, ce qui génère proximité et sympathie (Sias et Cahill 1998 ; Keyton 1999). Il serait pertinent d'observer sur l'espace virtuel, l'émergence de leaders naturels au sein d'un groupe . Une meilleure connaissance de leurs caractéristiques permettrait de les soutenir pour le plus grand bien du capital social de la marque.

Cependant, de nouvelles questions émergent, car les marques ne manqueront pas de vouloir mettre en scène leurs propres « e-leaders », générateurs de capital social. L'anonymat est de mise sur le Web, et il devra intégrer une communauté de marque via un forum comme celui que nous avons étudié, ou bien en créant un espace spécifique sur le Web via un des nombreux médias sociaux actuels (Facebook, LinkedIn...). La question éthique se pose à partir du moment où le « e-community manager » (qui pourrait diriger plusieurs « e-leaders » et en être un lui-même) collecterait et interpréterait les données, en observant « discrètement » le comportement des membres. N'y a-t-il pas tromperie à l'égard de ces interlocuteurs, alors que la confiance est une des dimensions fondamentales du capital social de la marque ?

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Counterfeiting and Culture: Consumer Attitudes towards Counterfeit Products

Abstract

This paper examines how culture influences consumer attitudes and behavior towards counterfeit luxury products. By using structural equation modeling and multigroup analysis on survey data, this paper shows how consumers' attitude towards counterfeits is stronger in Individualist and Feminine countries, and mainly influenced by social consensus and purpose of purchase.

To reduce the demand for counterfeits, marketers must therefore adopt culture-specific strategies to address subtle differences among various cultural groups. While counterfeiting should be emphasized as a shameful practice in Individualist countries, more emphasis should be placed on the overall society's well-being rather than individual rights in Collective countries.

Key Words : Counterfeiting, Culture, Cultural influences ,Consumer behavior, Counterfeit luxury products

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Introduction

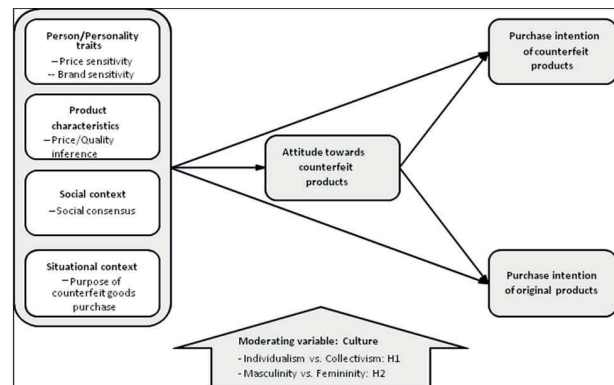
In recent years, the world market for counterfeit products – i.e., low quality, unauthorized replicas of products protected by Intellectual Property (IP) rights, usually sold through unauthorized channels at a fraction of the originals' cost – has dramatically increased (ICC, 2011). Among other product categories, luxury products are the most counterfeited, given their high dependence on brand name, reputation and image; they are also very popular with consumers and require relatively simple production technologies (Nia and Zaichkowsky 2000; Penz and Stöttinger 2005; Yoo and Lee 2009). However, counterfeiting cannot be attributed solely to sellers: demand from consumers who knowingly purchase counterfeit goods is, in fact, a major cause for the existence and growth of the phenomenon (Gentry et al. 2001; Norum and Cuno 2011).

Culture has been identified as a key factor in influencing attitude and purchase intention of counterfeits. Nevertheless, previous studies either focused on just one country (Chakraborty et al. 1996; Cheung and Prendergast 2006; Wan et al. 2009), or compared two/three countries (Ang et al. 2001; Bian and Veloutsou 2007; Chapa et al. 2006; Penz and Stöttinger 2008). The role played by consumer culture on counterfeit purchases, however, is likely to be more complex. The objective of this paper is thus to address such a complexity by studying the moderating effect of culture on the relationships between determinants, attitudes and purchase intentions of counterfeit luxury products. The approach taken is to measure cultural differences through two of Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimensions (Individualism-Collectivism and Masculinity-Femininity, since together they can better represent countries' cultural traits) on a heterogeneous sample of consumers from around the world.

Conceptual Framework, Research Model and Hypotheses

Previous research has investigated the determinants of consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions of counterfeit products (Cordell et al. 1996; Huang et al. 2004; Bian and Moutinho 2011; Kim et al. 2012). The model proposed here is derived from the studies of Eisend and Schuchert-Güler (2006) and Yoo and Lee (2009), to which we added the cultural moderating variable (Hofstede 1991; Steenkamp et al. 1999)

Figure 1: Theoretical framework



Determinants

Price Sensitivity (PS). Consumers who are sensitive to price have been found to be more prone to buying counterfeit products rather than original products (Nia and Zaichkowsky 2000). Thus, a high sensitivity to price has a positive effect on counterfeit products' evaluation by the consumer (D'Astous and Gargouri 2001). Price sensitivity can also be representative of a whole set of personal attributes ranging from monthly income to perceived risk (De Matos et al. 2007), value consciousness (Wang et al. 1995) and product involvement (Bian and Moutinho 2011).

Brand Sensitivity (BS). Also brand sensitivity positively affects counterfeit purchases (D'Astous and Gargouri 2001). If the consumer has a high sensitivity to the brand, this turns into attraction towards the counterfeit product, as the fake still conveys a 'prestigious' image. Consumers buying luxury products aim to show that they can afford the high prices of famous brand names, purchasing more of both original and counterfeit products (Nia and Zaichkowsky 2000). Developing this idea, brand sensitivity is used in this model to represent personal image (Chuchinprakarn 2003), self-identity (Yoo and Lee 2009), personal gratification and novelty-seeking (Wang et al. 2005).

Price/Quality inference (P/Q). In general terms, price advantage associated to counterfeit goods is one of the main motives for their purchase (Albers-Miller 1999). More specifically, however, previous studies have demonstrated that some consumers (smart shoppers) will choose counterfeits if they believe that such products are equal to the genuine, except for the fact that they offer a higher price advantage; others, alternatively, believe that the price cut more than compensates the loss of quality (Poddar et al. 2012).

Social Consensus (SC). Social consensus refers to the acceptance or rejection of consumers' behavior by a social circle of family members, friends or

business associates (Tan 2002). The more adverse the social consensus towards counterfeiting, the lower the intention to purchase fakes by a consumer, and vice versa. Social consensus also accounts for influences of group membership and aspiration (Chuchinprakarn 2003), ethical conceptions, moral judgments and integrity (De Matos et al. 2007), legality (Wang et al. 2005) and religious beliefs (Penz and Stöttinger 2005).

Purpose of purchase (PU). Bian and Veloutsou (2007) tested the effect of the purpose of purchase on attitude towards counterfeit products. They made a distinction between personal use and use as presents, showing how consumers were more willing to buy counterfeits for themselves rather than for others. In turn, counterfeit purchases are usually made for (in descending order) personal use, family member use, gifts to other, exchange with others, and other (Prendergast et al. 2002), and are more likely to occur on holiday rather than at home (Eisend and Schuchert-Güler 2006).

Culture as a moderating variable

Over this basic model, we considered the moderating role played by the cultural dimension. Culture is a subtle factor underlying attitudes, behaviors, perceptions and ideologies that is very difficult to change. Each culture around the globe has its own norms for what its citizens should think, say, do and wear (Lee and Workman 2011). It determines systematic differences in consumer behavior and also affects the needs consumers satisfy through the acquisition and use of goods (Steenkamp et al. 1999). Since counterfeiting is a global phenomenon, analyzing how culture can influence attitudes and behaviors becomes particularly relevant (Penz et al. 2009). Previous studies have demonstrated that culture-specific influences (values, legal norms, ethical codes) push different ethnic groups to behave differently on counterfeiting issues (Chakraborty et al. 1996; Husted 2000). However, the mechanisms through which culture affects consumers' attitudes and purchase intention have not been fully addressed by previous literature.

To empirically analyze cultural influences, this study makes use of Hofstede's (1991) cultural paradigm, and focuses on the role played by Individualism and Masculinity out of the five cultural dimensions identified in the original study. These two variables were chosen since individualistic and masculine countries would likely share many of the same characteristics, such as the desire for individual achievement and preference for autonomy (Clements et al. 2009).

Individualism and collectivism define the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups.

They represent the way people relate to others in their society and reflect emotional and cognitive attachments to particular networks of individuals (Husted, 2000). In collectivist cultures, morality is defined in terms of good of the well-being of the group, which means the maintenance of solidarity. On the other hand, in individualist countries, equity is preferred over equality. Therefore, when referring to counterfeit products, collectivist cultures will propend more towards sharing, since "individual claims on intellectual property are subordinated to more fundamental claims of social well-being" (Steidlmeier 1993). In these societies counterfeiters should flourish since greater product variety and consumption with the purpose of differentiating the purchaser from others are the widespread cultural norms (Santos and Ribeiro 2006). Individualist cultures, by contrast, will tend to condemn counterfeiting much more. Therefore, we claim:

H1: Individualism will moderate the relationships between determinants, attitudes and purchase intentions. The lower the Individualism of a country, the higher the effect of attitude towards purchase intention of counterfeits.

Masculinity vs. femininity refers to the solutions given by countries to the distribution of roles between genders, but also to the emphasis put onto wealth, success, ambition, material things, and achievement (in masculine countries) versus helping others, preserving the environment, and equality (in feminine countries). In masculine countries, ethical issues regarding business are less strongly perceived; such cultures tend to stress competition among people, performance, material success, ostentatious manliness and the pursuit of visible achievement. In turn, masculine countries overlook ethically questionable business practices and have a greater willingness to purchase counterfeit goods (Paul et al. 2006). We therefore state:

H2: Masculinity will moderate the relationships between determinants, attitudes and purchase intentions. The higher the Masculinity of a country, the higher the effect of attitude towards purchase intention of counterfeits.

Methodology

Procedure and Sample

A sample of university students from various countries was employed for this study. Students were chosen since they have homogenous attitudes and behaviors, and since they fall in the age group with a financial income that doesn't usually allow them access to genuine luxury products, making them attracted to counterfeits (Gentry et al. 2001). The data was collected on April-July 2011 through a website where students took one out of two identical

self-administered questionnaires, diverging only on the brand of the products tested. Participation was voluntary; anonymity was ensured and the demographic details were requested purely for statistical analysis. Given the cultural and linguistic diversity of respondents, the questionnaire was developed and submitted only in English under the assumption that all international university students have the same medium-high English knowledge, face the same difficulties in comprehension, and likely interpret the questions in the same way (Lowe and Corkindale 1998). A total of 204 complete responses were received.

Research Instrument and Measures

The questionnaire consisted of 6 sections and 30 questions. The survey instruments were built by adapting scales validated in previous research. All scales had a good reliability and a good consistency of measure (all Cronbach α values are greater than 0.6- Table 1). Table 2 shows Pearson's correlation tests among individual variables.

Tables 1 and 2

Table 1: Scales, items, Cronbach α s and sources

| SCALE ITEMS | AVG | STD DEV | Cronbach α | Source |
|--|------|------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Section 1. PERSON / PERSONALITY TRAITS | | | | |
| Price Sensitivity (PS) | | | 0.650 | D'Astous & Ouellet (2001) |
| I shop a lot for specials | 4.12 | 1.36 | | |
| I find myself checking the prices in the grocery store even for small items | 4.74 | 1.50 | | |
| A person can save a lot of money by shopping around for bargains | 5.02 | 1.44 | | |
| For me, the price of a product is crucial information | 5.37 | 1.02 | | |
| Brand Sensitivity (BS) | | | 0.528 | D'Astous & Ouellet (2001) |
| When making a purchase, I always give attention to the brand | 4.47 | 1.48 | | |
| In general, a brand tells a lot about a product's quality | 4.56 | 1.37 | | |
| For me, a brand name is a very important information | 4.46 | 1.55 | | |
| Section 2. PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS | | | | |
| Price Quality Inference (PQ) | | | 0.742 | Lee & Wolman (2011) |
| Buying counterfeit products demonstrates that I am a wise shopper | 2.48 | 1.48 | | |
| I like counterfeit products because they demonstrate initiative abilities on the part of the counterfeiter | 2.48 | 1.57 | | |
| I buy counterfeit products because the prices of the designer products are unfair and overpriced | 4.04 | 2.04 | | |
| Counterfeit products are just as good as designer products | 2.63 | 1.63 | | |
| Section 3. SOCIAL CONTEXT | | | | |
| Social Consensus (SC) | | | 0.777 | Tan (2002) |
| Your friends, relatives or associates are against buying counterfeit products | 3.83 | 1.56 | | |
| Your friends, relatives or associates regard the act of buying counterfeit products as unethical | 3.42 | 1.54 | | |
| Section 4. SITUATIONAL CONTEXT | | | | |
| Purpose of Counterfeit Products Purchase (PQ) | | | 0.780 | Bian & Yildirim (2007) |
| I am willing to buy counterfeit products for my own use | 3.34 | 1.39 | | |
| I often buy counterfeit products for my own use | 2.45 | 1.41 | | |
| I am willing to buy counterfeit products as presents | 1.89 | 1.38 | | |
| I often buy counterfeit products as presents | 1.60 | 1.17 | | |
| Section 5. ATTITUDE | | | | |
| Attitude (A) | | | 0.872 | De Masi et al. (2007) |
| Counterfeiting, I prefer counterfeit Gucci D&G sunglasses | 3.44 | 2.54 | | |
| I like shopping for counterfeit Gucci D&G sunglasses | 2.23 | 1.53 | | |
| Buying counterfeit Gucci D&G sunglasses generally benefits the consumer | 2.79 | 1.44 | | |
| There's nothing wrong with purchasing counterfeit Gucci D&G sunglasses | 3.04 | 1.82 | | |
| Generally speaking, buying counterfeit Gucci D&G sunglasses is a better choice | 2.45 | 1.41 | | |
| Section 6. PURCHASE INTENTIONS | | | | |
| Purchase Intention of Counterfeits (PIC) | | | 0.812 | Coyte & Thomson (2001) |
| It is very likely that I will buy counterfeit Gucci D&G sunglasses | 2.31 | 1.37 | | |
| I will purchase counterfeit Gucci D&G the next time I need sunglasses | 1.98 | 1.38 | | |
| I will definitely buy counterfeit Gucci D&G | 2.31 | 1.57 | | |
| Suppose a friend called you last night to get your advice in his/her search for sunglasses. Would you recommend him/her to buy counterfeit Gucci D&G sunglasses? | 2.43 | 1.55 | | |
| Purchase Intention of Originals (PIO) | | | 0.851 | Coyte & Thomson (2001) |
| It is very likely that I will buy original Gucci D&G sunglasses | 4.81 | 1.88 | | |
| I will purchase original Gucci D&G the next time I need sunglasses | 3.67 | 1.84 | | |
| I will definitely buy original Gucci D&G | 4.01 | 1.92 | | |
| Suppose a friend called you last night to get your advice in his/her search for sunglasses. Would you recommend him/her to buy original Gucci D&G sunglasses? | 4.46 | 1.68 | | |

Table 2: Correlation analysis

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----|
| PS | 1 | | | | | | | |
| BS | .206** | 1 | | | | | | |
| P/Q | .204** | -.092 | 1 | | | | | |
| SC | -.003 | .142* | -.445** | 1 | | | | |
| PU | .041 | -.086 | .613** | -.453** | 1 | | | |
| A | .071 | -.022 | .594** | -.460** | .594** | 1 | | |
| PIC | .044 | -.030 | .616** | -.348** | .597** | .735** | 1 | |
| PIO | .118 | .187** | -.206** | .327** | -.248** | -.417** | -.251** | 1 |
| PS | | BS | P/Q | SC | PU | A | PIC | PIO |

$\chi^2=234.716$; $df=106$; $\chi^2/df = 2.21$; $p=.000$; CFI = .900; GFI = .889; RMSEA = .077 (Bollen & Long, 1993). Further details upon request.

Section 1 through 5 used 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7). Section 6 collected information on the respondents' demographic characteristics, i.e. gender, age, education, occupation, nationality and income (table 3).

Table 3

Table 3: Sample's demographic characteristics

| Variable | n. | % of total |
|--------------------------------|-----|------------|
| GENDER | | |
| Male | 93 | 45% |
| Female | 112 | 55% |
| AGE | | |
| 19-21 | 53 | 26% |
| 22-24 | 111 | 54% |
| 25-27 | 25 | 12% |
| 28-30 | 8 | 4% |
| >30 | 8 | 4% |
| EDUCATION | | |
| 1 st year | 3 | 1.5% |
| 2 nd year | 19 | 9% |
| 3 rd year | 57 | 28% |
| 4 th year | 40 | 19.5% |
| 5 th year | 59 | 29% |
| 6 th year | 10 | 5% |
| 7 th year | 5 | 2.5% |
| >7 th | 12 | 5.5% |
| OCCUPATION | | |
| Yes, working while studying | 76 | 37% |
| No, not working while studying | 129 | 63% |
| MONTHLY INCOME (€) | | |
| <500 | 106 | 52% |
| 500-1,499 | 69 | 34% |
| 1,500-2,499 | 7 | 3% |
| 2,500-4,999 | 4 | 2% |
| >5,000 | 2 | 1% |
| No answer provided | 17 | 8% |

In regards to the two cultural variables, each respondent was assigned to a "high" level or a "low" level of Individualism (IDV) and Masculinity (MAS), depending on whether the value of the two variables for their country-of-origin (taken from Hofstede's 1991 original study) was higher or lower than the average of the respective variables computed across all respondents (table 4).

Table 4

Table 4: High vs. Low Individualism and Masculinity

| | IDV | | MAS | |
|-----------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|
| | n. | % | n. | % |
| HIGH (H) | 143 | 70,09 | 120 | 58,82 |
| LOW (L) | 61 | 29,91 | 84 | 41,18 |
| TOTAL | 204 | 100 | 204 | 100 |

Product and Brand Stimuli

In order to involve the respondents in a hypothetical purchase-intention situation, sections 5 and 6 were about specific products and brands. Given the budget constraints that students usually face, we excluded from our analysis luxurious product categories that were considered too expensive (e.g. dresses, watches, cars). We thus focused on sunglasses since this product category is

widely used among young people. Gucci and Dolce&Gabbana brands were chosen since both are famous Italian luxury brands and among the most counterfeited worldwide.

Findings

Econometric Model

We used Structural Equations Modeling (SEM) to analyze the overall model and the model with cultural moderation. According to the results of a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)¹, we decided to use the mean values of question items as representative of the 5 unobserved determinants. After running the overall model with SEM, multigroup analysis was carried out to test cultural moderation. Goodness-of-fit indices and significances for both the overall model and the model with cultural moderation are reported in tables 5 and 6.

Tables 5 and 6

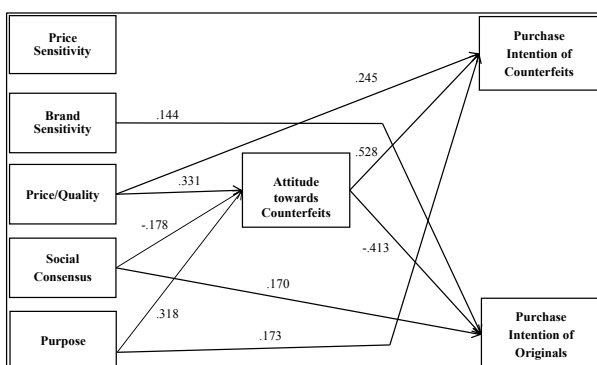
Table 5: Validity of the SEM models

| | Overall Model | MAS | IDV |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------|-------|
| RMR (<0.5) | 0.015 | 0.024 | 0.023 |
| RMSEA (<0.08) | 0.017 | 0.062 | 0.071 |
| GFI (>0.9) | 0.999 | 0.996 | 0.995 |
| AGFI (>0.9) | 0.954 | 0.846 | 0.825 |

Only three determinants (P/Q, SC and PU) resulted to have a significant effect on Attitude. Direct relationships between determinants and purchase intentions were significant for P/Q and PU towards purchase intention of counterfeits (PIC) (positive relationships), and for BS and SC towards purchase intention of originals (PIO) (positive relationships). Attitude was found to significantly affect both PIC (positive relationship) and PIO (negative relationship) (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Figure 2: Significant relationships in the overall model



Cultural Influences

While a general comparison between the original model and the model with cultural moderation will be discussed further below, in this section we focus our attention on the moderating effect of the two cultural variables, IDV and MAS.

In both high and low IDV countries (Figures 3 and 4), Attitude was found to be a significant determinant of both PIC and PIO. In the case of PIO, both in high and low IDV countries, a positive attitude towards counterfeit products will result in lower PIO. Hypothesis 1 is therefore fully supported: in low IDV countries, Attitude is higher than in high IDV countries (0.680 vs. 0.480). This supports the hypothesis that collectivist cultures view counterfeits more positively than individualist cultures.

Figures 3 and 4

Figure 3: Significant relationships for low IDV countries

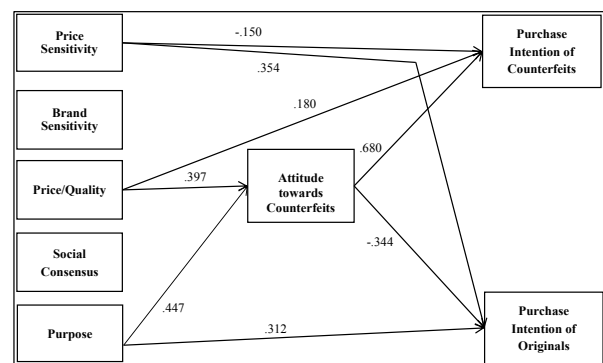
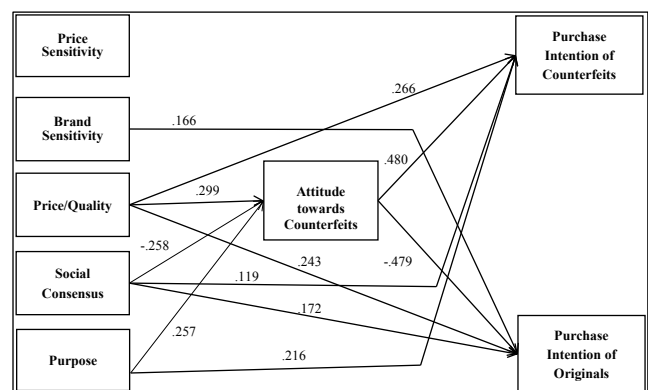


Figure 4: Significant relationships for high IDV countries



In the case of MAS (Figures 5 and 6), Attitude was found to be a significant determinant of both PIC and PIO in both groups of countries. In the case of PIO, both in high and low MAS countries, the relationship was found to be negative. However, Attitude had a higher impact on PIC in low MAS countries compared to high MAS countries (0.703 vs. 0.469). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 has to be rejected, since feminine countries have a higher propensity towards counterfeits than masculine countries.

Figure 5 and 6

Figure 5: Significant relationships for low MAS countries

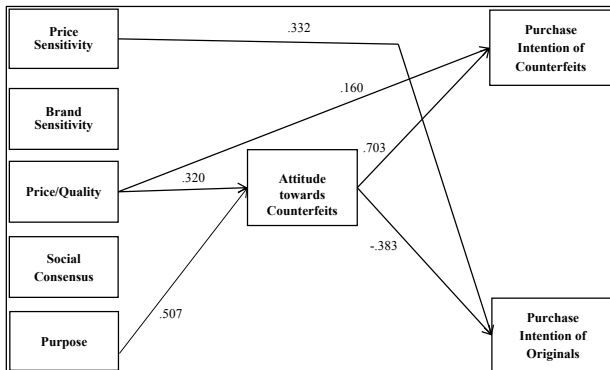
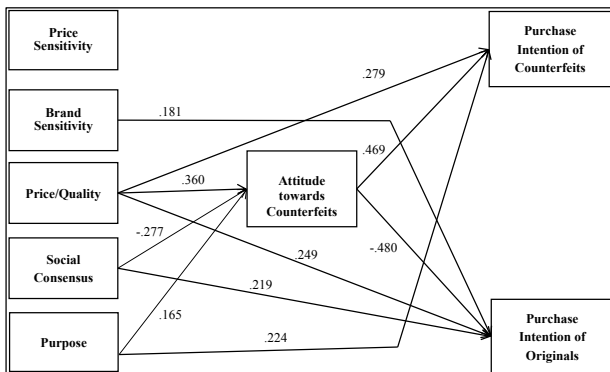


Figure 6: Significant relationships for high MAS countries



Discussions and Conclusions

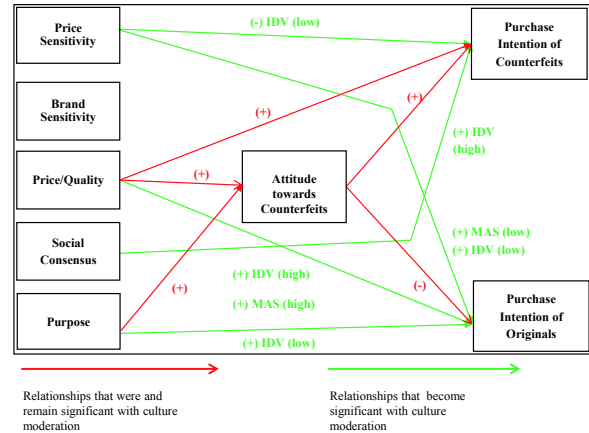
Discussion

This study offers some contributions to the literature on counterfeit products. First, the inclusion of culture within the model, intended both as nationality/ country-of-origin and as the shared values, practices, and experiences which characterize groups of people, allows a better understanding of the counterfeiting phenomenon, in contrast with previous studies that treated culture as a residual, generic variable.

Second, since counterfeiting is a global phenomenon, this study reassessed the applicability of previous research (Penz and Stöttinger 2005; Chakraborty et al. 1996) to a broader context. Our analysis shows how culture does have a moderating effect on the relationship between determinants, Attitude and PIC. When the original model was re-run with the cultural variables, some relationships that were significant in the original model remained significant (and culture simply reinforces or weakens the original relationship), while others that were not significant in the original model became significant (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Figure 7: Effects of cultural moderation



The effect of Attitude on PIC is lower for consumers from more Masculine countries, like Croatia, Bulgaria or Italy, compared with those from more Feminine countries, like Sweden, Holland or Finland. The effect of Attitude on PIC is lower for consumers from Individualistic cultures, like USA, Australia or Germany, compared with more Collectivist cultures, like China, Taiwan or South Korea.

Managerial and Political Implications

The results of the study provide interesting managerial and political implications on how to reduce consumer complicity and consumer demand for counterfeit products. Each national group has a different attitude towards counterfeits: global marketers must therefore be alert of the subtle cultural differences among consumers and reflect them in advertising messages and social communication campaigns aimed at curbing consumer complicity and increasing awareness on the damaging consequences of counterfeiting. For instance, in Individualist countries it should be stressed that counterfeiting is a shameful practice that brings loss of face upon family, school and business firms. In Collectivist countries, more emphasis could be placed on the overall society's well-being rather than individual rights.

Given the higher propensity of people in Collectivist cultures to purchase counterfeits, more resources should be destined to fight the phenomenon in these countries. Anti-counterfeiting campaigns, carried out by brand owners on their own or with the patronage of institutions/anti-counterfeiting associations, should emphasize the unethical nature and limited social benefits of the phenomenon. Firms need to be more proactive in Collectivist countries by convincing governments that counterfeiting negatively affects countries' economies, societies and individual consumers, and that stricter

regulations and enforcement should increase the overall well-being of the society.

Since P/Q was a significant determinant for both Attitude and PIC across both cultural variables, firms should also think about modifying consumers' perception of counterfeits' price/quality relationship and increasing the perceived value of buying the "real thing" (Penz et al. 2009). To further deter consumer demand for counterfeits, marketers could also activate specific anti-counterfeiting strategies (protection, cooperation, prosecution and information) and use different technologies, either track-and-trace, overt or covert (Pastore and Cesareo 2012).

Limitations, Further Research and Conclusion

The study suffers different limitations. First, the limited heterogeneity of the convenience sample implies low generalizability of results. Second, only one product category was tested, affecting respondents' attitude and purchase intentions. Finally, even though Hofstede's data is the 'normal science' approach to cross-cultural business studies, it is somewhat outdated. More methodological and statistical fine-tuning is therefore required.

In order to address such limitations, the study could be extended to different product categories that require different involvement, knowledge and perceived risk (such as very luxurious jewelry, cars or clothing), thus making the results more generalizable. Furthermore, Hofstede's societal variables could be measured at the individual level to test cultural differences more accurately, since cultural variables often operate at both national and individual levels (Husted and Allen 2008). Similarly, the cultural dimensions could be combined with demographic variables.

Albeit these limitations, this study makes an important initial contribution to the project of examining the influence of cultural differences on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions towards counterfeit products. Our work suggests that firms and governments' policies for the prevention and control of counterfeiting need to be sensitive to the cultural heterogeneity of consumers around the world.

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The online social networks as political communication

This research stems from the idea that inspired the article written by Jon Gertner “Social Media as Social Index” (2010) published with The 10th Annual Year in Ideas of The New York Times. This paper compares different scientific studies using the messages launched by Twitter users and their consequences as social index. This topic appears to be promising, but it is even more relevant that Cameron Marlow, head of Facebook data scientists’ team, sentences: “... it seems like it’s improbable that the social media won’t be the way that we acquire opinion research”. Gertner (2010) states that the Internet and the social networking sites could be very useful tools not only for market research, but for all areas of marketing and sales, also for estimating the vote of an electoral process.

Key words : marketing, vote, Twitter, Spain, political communication

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The Social Networks and the Internet.

The social networks have existed since the beginning of mankind, as evidence by the *Theory of Six Degrees* (Karinthy, 1930; Watts, 2004) and *The Problem of Small World* (Milgram, 1967). Mitchell (1973) grouped the two schools (the graph theory and the structural functionalism) that laid the foundations of social network analysis. With the emergence of Internet and the World Wide Web, the *Search Marketing* (search engine marketing or Internet marketing) (Boughton, 2005) and *RSS* (Really Simple Syndication files. Rss. xml to indicate or share content on the web) (Murugesan, 2007), there were numerous applications including the social networking sites, whose business plan is based on the theories previously formulated. *Friendster* was the first social network to appear in 2002, later on the *Friendster's* structure was replicated by *MySpace* in 2003, *Facebook* in 2004 and *Twitter* in 2006.

According to O'Reilly (2004), the Web 2.0 is divided into *communication applications* (blogs [short for web log or web log], social networking, social networking aggregation), *collaboration* (wikis [websites that can be edited by users], *social bookmarking sites news, podcasts* [media file or dissemination of multimedia files on the Internet], forums), *multimedia* (video sharing, photo sharing, live casting [broadcast audio, video, live internet], audio and share music) and *entertainment* (virtual worlds, share games, online games). There are several platforms that work with these four features. The best known supports are *Video Search* (Gibbon & Liu, 2008), *Podcasting* (Edison Research, 2009), *Blog* (Nardi et al, 2004), *Mobile Search Marketing* (marketing or search engine marketing Internet on mobile phone carrier) (comScore, 2011; eMarketer, 2010) and *social networking / social media* (O'Reilly, 2005; Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

These platforms are certainly optimal tools for communication and political marketing, because for a politician or a political party they offer several strengths and opportunities that other supports cannot provide such as flexibility, interactivity, more direct communication and the opportunity of monitoring the information received (Artusi & Maurizzi, 2010). It would be extremely naive to think that such applications or sites are used for communication among users only. They are companies that receive a lot of data, making mining, analysis, extraction and use of these data, their rationale. Edward Snowden revealed that the National Security Agency or NSA and the PRISM program were monitoring Facebook (NSA collecting phone records of millions of Verizon customers daily, 2013; NSA Prism program taps into user data

of Apple, Google and others, 2013). These data are reversed in marketing goals or resold to third parties to perform similar actions, questioning the laws on privacy (O'Brien, 2012; Barrett, 2010; Andrews, 2012; Clemente, 2011).

Concluding the analysis of the social networks and their application to the Internet, it is concluded that they are closely related to the behavior, influence, image, productivity, conduct, results and in relation to various sectors such as anthropology, sanitation, geography or economics. This fact makes feasible the study of social networking sites as tools to influence political behavior. From the point of view of this research, these data could be useful to predict the estimated vote analyzing the users of these social networks during an election call, beyond the polls and the dynamics of the social network sites. Twitter is a microblogging network (whose blog post has a maximum of 140 characters), and it appears very appropriate for this analysis. To perform this analysis it is mandatory to investigate whether social networking sites have the necessary penetration to carry out this work, and to review the literature linking Internet and politics.

The Social Network sites in Spain. Twitter.

The studies of ONTSI (2011), The Cocktail Analysis (2012; 2013), IAB (2012; 2013) were analyzed. The conclusions are that Spain is one of the leading countries in the use of social networks and Twitter is the leader microblogging network; Twitter is the third most used social network in Spain and the third preferred social network to be used in the future. Twitter is currently growing at a rate of 33%, annual average; its purpose is to gain leisure/professional profiles based on personal/professional and microblogging profiles. Twitter is an open social network with an horizontal level of integration.

Chart 1.
Penetration of social networking sites in 2014.

| | Yes | No | No Internet |
|----------------|-----|-----|-------------|
| UK | 52% | 33% | 15% |
| USA | 50% | 29% | 21% |
| Russia | 50% | 9% | 42% |
| Czech Republic | 49% | 30% | 22% |
| Spain | 49% | 30% | 21% |
| Poland | 40% | 17% | 42% |
| Brazil | 40% | 9% | 51% |
| France | 39% | 36% | 25% |
| Italy | 38% | 24% | 38% |
| Turkey | 35% | 8% | 56% |
| Lebanon | 34% | 15% | 51% |
| Tunisia | 34% | 7% | 57% |
| Germany | 34% | 46% | 20% |
| Mexico | 33% | 3% | 63% |
| China | 31% | 18% | 50% |
| Japan | 30% | 36% | 34% |
| Egypt | 30% | 7% | 63% |
| Greece | 29% | 19% | 51% |
| Jordan | 29% | 6% | 65% |
| India | 6% | 1% | 89% |
| Pakistan | 35 | 3% | 94% |

Source: Global Attitudes Project. Pew Research Center.

Among the main activities of Twitter we highlight *take part in advocacy / civic mobilization* with a frequency of very common and quite often 18%. This activity did not exist in 2009 and 2010. The users make use of these networks as *tools of influence* and *a way to express themselves with no censorship* (12% of users), also as a *vehicle for awareness / mobilization* with a frequency of very common to quite often. These data confirm the importance of these tools as potential sources of rich and diverse information in reference to current political issues, political parties or electoral process. These results confirm the enormous potential as a tool for prediction and estimation of the vote for any electoral process, Twitter is the social network most frequently used as a social mobilization tool to support a political call.

Therefore, the users of social networks have diversified their main purpose, from a playful communication tool to share, to a communication tool where more and more users not only want to interact or communicate, but to use them for two-way communication that allows them to be present in a globalized world, influencing on events directly, recommending and reviewing all kinds of global and

local issues. This *democratization of influence* in the network is a potential market that is already being developed by various brands but not always with positive results, a phenomenon that is seen in the various frequencies of use. It is also a potential tool for political parties in order to measure the estimation of the vote, so that very relevant findings are confirmed in these studies: the growth of the social networks as tools of mobilization, expression, social awareness and policy; and Twitter as the chosen support for them. These findings propel a literature review of Internet and politics.

The Internet and Politics.

The advent of the era of information and technology in post-industrial societies has changed the way to execute the actions of political communication. The formulation of concepts such as *Third Age of Political Communication* and *Third Age of Political Communication* (Blumberg & Kavanagh, 1999), *Postmodern Campaign* (Norris, 2000), *Permanent Campaign* (Nimmo, 1999), *Politics as usual* (Margolis & Resnick, 2000) and *Postbureaucratic Policy* (Bimber, 2003); indicate that we are in a new era of political communication where campaigns become postmodern thanks to the Internet, we are always under a political campaign because the Internet is considered a policy tool for everyday communication. There is no doubt that these formulations show the change of the political communication experience. The new technologies influence the society in a more precise manner, delivering messages to a target audience increasingly segmented, activating and mobilizing it. Therefore the marketing is more agile, one to one, where interactivity plays a fundamental role. So the political marketing and the technologies generate content, opinion; they may serve to estimate the voting and policy trends using various tools.

The new tools of communication technology (SMS or Short Message Service messages), Internet (Web 2.0), social networking sites, ... make the political communication more flexible (Mylona, 2008; Ward, 2003; Lusoli, Ward & Gibson, 2006), *one way or more direct way* (Anduiza, 2009; Ward, 2003; Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2002), an evolution of the communication from *one to many* to *many to many* (Gibson & Rommele, 2008), with simplicity of the message (Mylona, 2008), no editorial control (Ward, 2003), less top down and more bottom up (Mylona, 2008; Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2003; Gibson & Rommele, 2008), fostering the ability to mobilize/ local and global protests (Lance Bennett, Breunig & Givens, 2008; Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2002; Artusi & Maurizzi, 2010; Vaccari, 2008; Bimber & Davis, 2003), low cost (Mylona, 2008; Ward, 2003),

accessible, closer to the young voter (Mylona, 2008; Blais, Gidengil & Nevite, 2004; Leppäniemi et al, 2010; Norris, 2003), more interactive (Norris, 2000; Farrel & Webb, 2000; Mylona, 2008), to promote e-discussion or discussion in the network (Bimber, 2001), propitiate less political influence in the media (Blumber & Kavannagh, 1999), promoting cyber activism (Blumber & Kavannagh, 1999; Sherman & Schiffman, 2002; Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2003), allowing transmission of messages in a limited way or narrowcasting (Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2002). All these features are conditioned by the digital divide or penetration of this technology in the population (Mylona, 2008).

Within Democracy 2.0. and Government 2.0 (Dominguez, 2009), the new tools of communication technology, the Internet, the social networking sites; they not only have the characteristics or functions from above, but they also promote the digital democracy or e-democracy (Demertzis et al, 2005), reinforce the review (Bimber & Davis, 2003), allow to microsegment or segment to influence the vote (Artusi & Maurizzi, 2010; Leppäniemi et al 2010), raise funds or help fundraising (Towner & Dulio, 2012; Bimber & Davis, 2003), capture and engage voters/engagement (Vaccari, 2008; Lusoli, Ward & Gibson, 2006; Leppäniemi et al, 2010), persuade the undecided voter (Vaccari, 2008).

From a scientific point of view, the political communication in this context presents more opportunities than threats, but the reality is that politicians and political parties do not benefit the participatory power of the Internet, operating mainly through top-down communication strategies, low interconnectivity, wrong use of digital political communication, only to promote themselves; especially in the major parties (Anduiza, 2009; Lillekerd, 2010; Demertzis et al, 2005; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010). This is a weakness against the vote of the youth because they are a very active segment of voters in the area of new technologies (Blais, Gidengil & Nevite, 2004; Leppäniemi, Karjalisto & Goman, 2010). Nevertheless, new technologies, the Internet, the Web 2.0, the social networking sites are an opportunity for minority parties (Norris, 2003; Lillekerd, 2010; Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2002; Lusoli, Ward & Gibson, 2006), because they can reach more people at minimal cost, especially young people, matching the major parties without the editorial control of the traditional media, mainly used by the major parties. The difference between the U.S. and Europe regarding this topic is clear, due to technological development and the European political pluralism.

Regarding the investigation of politics and the social networking sites, especially Twitter, there are several areas of research in which different models and research methods envision different outcomes. These fields or categories of research are: influence, mobilization, sentiment, data, credibility, prediction and research on events that occurred in different countries and institutions. The research focused on the influence (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003) concludes that social networking sites are more compelling and persuasive than personal interactions; they affect a number of individuals with minimal effort and more flexibility. Regarding mobilization, the online political mobilization works because the policy itself induces to the expression and also to the collection of information and validation of the vote, but may also discourage the voting (Bond, Fariss & Jones, 2012; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010). Feeling or semantic analysis of data in the social networks (Birmingham & Smeaton, 2012; Bollen, Pepe & Mao, 2010; O'Connor et al, 2010) concludes that the politicians and the political, cultural and economic events are correlated with significant levels of mood, although the techniques and analysis must be substantially improved. André et al (2012) argue that the happy feelings expressed in the tweets are rated positively, while negative messages or tweets are not. The data extracted from the social networking sites, specifically Twitter, are valid for exercising marketing actions (Mislove et al, 2011; Jansen et al, 2009; Weng et al, 2012), regarding credibility they question that all data published on social networking sites are credible (Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2010; Honey & Herring, 2009; Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

Referring to political prediction, there is more divergence as some authors and researchers argue that Twitter is a tool for estimating the vote, while others refute this thesis. Congosto, Moro & Fernández (2011) highlight the growing influence of the users of the social networks and Twitter as a key tool for communication in real time. They also point out how competitive the role of Twitter is, in relation to the election polls, because Twitter acts as a probe to measure the opinion continuously, in a much longer period; they also emphasize the more transparent nature of Twitter when sending messages or opinions because Twitter's users want their free speech messages to be spread. Sang & Bos (2011) predict the results of the Senate election in the Netherlands using Twitter. They investigate two variants of each political party, the abbreviation of the name and the name. They remove the tweets mentioning more than one party and they only

keep the first tweets of each user. A combination of the two is the counted data: storing the first tweet that mentions a political party of each user. They then analyze manually the sentiment, drawing if the messages are positive or negative in relation to each political party. The result is that the analysis reassembled the actual election results with a margin of 1.7%, but the prediction of the three major parties varied 1 point, with an error of 29% higher than the results of the two polls.

Tumasjan et al (2011) investigate whether one can predict the outcome of an election using Twitter, gauge the political sentiment by the 140 characters that a tweet has. They analyze 104,003 tweets posted in the weeks before the elections in Germany on September 27, 2009 (from August 13 to September 19). The number of tweets reflects the voter preferences and approximates the results of traditional surveys. The feeling of the messages on Twitter corresponds closely to the political agenda, the profiles of the candidates and evidence of media coverage campaign. Twitter messages reflect the results of the elections, even closer than the results of the polls. Twitter can be considered a valid indicator of political opinion and real-time indicator of the political sentiment, as according to these authors the tweets mentioning a political party may be considered a plausible reflection of the percentage of votes, hence concluding that Twitter's predictive power is more accurate than election polls. Jungherr, Jürgens & Schoen (2011) analyze whether elections can be predicted using Twitter, taking into account the Pirate Party's victory in the elections in Germany in 2009. This article is a response to the article of Tumasjan et al (2011). The authors reject the conclusion that the tweets mentioning a political party may be considered a plausible reflection of the percentage of votes, hence concluding that Twitter's predictive power is more accurate than election polls. This hypothesis is rejected for three reasons: 1) it does not indicate or specify the rules for data collection in general, nor the reason of the choice of the parties to discuss, and why they choose that period to collect information, 2) the methodology chosen is not appropriate, 3) the mentions on Twitter are not a valid indicator of the offline political sentiment or future results of the vote.

In relation to the research of social networking activity at certain events occurring in several countries simultaneously, some researchers point to the importance of the social networks as a mobilizing medium, while others dismiss this idea. Skoric et al (2012) analyze the elections of 2011 in Singapore from April 27 (call) to May 7 (elections).

They conclude that there is a moderate force of correspondence between the share of tweets and share of votes nationwide. Regarding the political feeling, Twitter and its data are more relevant at a macro level than a micro level, or specific. The level of quality in the data prediction on Twitter, depends on the level of democracy and censorship in the country. Larsson & Moe (2012) focus on the analysis of Twitter during a general election in Sweden. The analysis was based on 99,382 tweets collected from a month before the election (September 19, 2010) and up to four days after that. They conclude that the active users of Twitter produce more information unlike most of the anonymous users, so Twitter is a tool for disseminating information rather than dialogue, the data extracted from Twitter should be extrapolated to the general use of Twitter by all voters. In general, the authors encourage further research of Twitter as a tool for data extraction, because even their contribution is quite limited to the interaction of Twitter users, rather than the extraction of semantic data.

Gayo-Avello (2011) analyzes Twitter as a tool to predict an election results during the US election in 2008. The author states that Twitter cannot predict election results. The main conclusions of the research are: not everyone uses Twitter (there is a problem among a sample of Twitter to be considered as a sample of the population of study), not all Twitter users who write posts do it about politics, not all the content on Twitter is true and the feeling expressed on Twitter should be analyzed in a simpler way. He proposes some recommendations for future research: define the sentiment analysis of the political tweets, detect propaganda and disinformation, detect not real users of Twitter, verify credibility, investigate demographic data and assign demographic attributes, basic research participation of the user. Mustafaraj & Metaxas (2010) study Twitter during two months collecting 2,500 topics. The conclusion when it comes to the credibility of the content on Twitter is that the lack of information about the users of Twitter does not allow concluding that the content is real and credible. Asur & Huberman (2010) confirm that it is possible to use the content of social networking sites to predict results in real time. They conducted a study based on Twitter to predict the box office. They apply for the analysis a linear regression model; also they perform an analysis by the subjectivity of feeling (positive and negative tweets divided by neutral tweets) and the polarity (positive feeling tweets divided by negative sentiment). In conclusion, it is confirmed that there is a strong correlation between the amount of attention given to a film and the later position in

the box office. After analyzing the sentiment of the tweets, they confirm their effectiveness in improving predictions once the films have been released. The authors argue that this method can be extrapolated to predict election results.

O Connor et al (2010) investigates the sense of the text in Twitter related to the public opinion. According to the authors, undermining the public opinion of the content published on Twitter could be a faster and a less expensive alternative to traditional surveys, but Twitter only allows writing an average of 11 words per message. For the analysis they used 1 trillion of tweets published in 2008 and 2009. Through a textual analysis they recovered messages and estimated the opinion, to see if these messages express positive or negative opinions or news about a topic by extracting the feeling. Cautiously one could argue that surveys could be replaced by a simple collection of text data generated by a social networking site. But the techniques and analysis should be substantially improved. In this sense, Mislove et al (2011) state that Twitter presents a unique opportunity to examine the public communication of a fraction of the population. The question they ask is whether Twitter is a representative example of society. They analyze 1,8 million tweets sent by 55 million users between March 2006 and August 2009 to compare socioeconomic, educational level and type of job, since there are only data concerning the users name, their location and the text of tweets. The analysis is based on three pillars: geographical distribution, gender and race. The conclusions they reach are: Twitter users significantly represent the most densely regions in the U.S., the users are predominantly male, and they represent a nonrandom sample of classification of race distribution.

Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers (2010) discuss the use of Twitter by the US Congress members. The conclusion they reach is that they use this tool for self-promotion, not for a direct communication between congressmen and citizens. Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt (2010) argue that political influence is produced by the interaction of voters with people in their daily environment and the mass media. Aday et al (2011) present a report on the relationship of the new media and the Arab spring that toppled regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and protests in Bahrain. They analyze the codes bit.ly as URL shortener and as a link of a website. They conclude that they served more to disseminate information out of the region than in the same region. So the social networks used by the bit.ly links do not appear to have played an important

role in collective action. Burns & Eltham (2009), study the role that Twitter played in public diplomacy and information operators in the crisis of the election in Iran in 2009. It was an important tool to mobilize people and influence the international media about what was happening in Iran. The effect of Twitter should have been a catalyst for a peaceful regime change in Iran, but the fact is that it was not.

As can be seen, the political communication has many advantages in the current context where the information and technology prevalence; but there are political parties, politicians and institutions that do not take this chance, not even one of the tools with more notoriety, the social networking sites. Not all political parties use them in the same way, but what is truly remarkable is the importance that new technologies have had on various political events in different countries like Ukraine (Kyj, 2006) and Egypt (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). This fact, along with the importance of data for marketing researchers, makes several researchers extract that data from Twitter to predict events, trends and results; because Twitter offers a unique opportunity to discuss the public communication of a fraction of the population (Mislove et al, 2011).

So there are publications that analyze software as IARPA (Goth, 2012) or iScience Map (Reips & Garaizar, 2011). While some researchers reject the hypothesis of Twitter as a tool of political prediction (Gayo-Avello, 2011; Jungherr, Jürgens & Schoen, 2011; Mustafaraj & Chung, 2011), other corroborate it (Tumasjan et al, 2011; Asur & Huberman, 2010; Sang & Bos, 2012; O'Connor et al, 2010).

Twitter Metrics.

Twitter is a social network whose business model is advertising and to sale its data to third parties for marketing and sales. But the analysis of this social networking site looms the mechanisms and decrypt algorithms, metrics, techniques and ultimately the Twitter model, concluding that Twitter is a source with a huge potential for measuring trends behaviors, liking, predictions; and probably for the estimation of the vote.

Until now the findings of this article are: Twitter, the microblogging site, is the best tool to investigate the estimation of the vote. Twitter is the fastest growing social network for expressing opinions and to mobilize. The interest of some researchers in Twitter makes clear the interest of the social media as a tool for estimating the vote. Some researchers find Twitter a tool for estimating the vote, confirming this hypothesis, other researchers refute this hypothesis. Twitter has a complex metric to monitor the user behavior. The

companies doing market research and election polls in Spain do not use social networking sites as tools for estimate the vote. With these findings a scientific method and several hypotheses are formulated to confirm or refute that the social networking sites are tools for estimating the vote. The framework of the research is the elections to the Catalan Parliament on November 25, 2012.

The Hypothesis Approach.

Before formulating the hypotheses, it is essential to identify the problem under study and the theoretical statement. The social networks sites as a tool for estimating the vote, is the problem under study. The theoretical statement says that from the commercial and the user point of view, the importance of the social networking sites in Spain and other types of networks is confirmed, also the great future for them, and their performance for data mining (Twitter). In academia several studies have proven the importance of the social networks. With the advent of the Internet, the social networking sites have become increasingly relevant and several researchers are addressing this issue and their potential. In relation to the social networks on the Internet and politics, from the point of view of a company or business, it has been concluded that these tools have been used increasingly for social mobilization, for free speech, what is called the *democratization of influence*. Twitter is the tool with most estimate growth and it is the leader as a social networking website of microblogging. It is important to stand out the limited use of this medium as a tool for estimating the vote by the market research companies. Several academic researchers are focused on the use of the social networking sites as tools of measurement, estimation and prediction of policies beyond new media, with special emphasis on Twitter trends.

Therefore, the hypotheses deduced are:

H1: Twitter predicts actual trends in society.

H2: Twitter mobilizes politically active users.

H3: Twitter is a tool for estimating the vote.

The Methodology Approach.

The goal is to get relevant information about the changes in trends/voting intentions of one or more specific segments of the electorate, those who frequently use the Internet and the social networks, to identify specific sub-segments within them. For this, a selection of a random sample of Twitter users is done during the elections to the Catalan Parliament on November 25, 2012.

The campaign period for the elections to the Catalan Parliament on November 25 of 2012, was from November 9 to 22, the 935 Twitter users who write more posts or tweets with the hashtag #25N

in Catalunya are selected from November 1 to November 29, 2012. They are instructed to complete a pre-election survey questionnaire about political-ideological and electoral issues (November 1 to 23). Then, the tweets of the 935 users are analyzed during that period. Finally, the users are indicated to participate in a final quiz or post-election survey (November 26 to December 9), so each user of Twitter can explain its voting behavior and whether there has been any change in the voting behavior or attitude towards parties and candidates. Also, to glimpse the role that Twitter may have had while participating.

So, the universe of this study is Twitter users related to electoral political issues in the elections to the Catalan Parliament on November 25, 2012; during the period from 1 to 29 November 2012. The sample is a representation of the previous universe, a random selection of users who write more messages or tweets with the hashtag #25N during the period from 1 to November 29, 2012 at Catalunya environment.

The information is collected in two ways:

- The electoral campaign for the elections to the Catalan Parliament on November 25, 2012 was from November 9, until 24 hours before the election day, November 23. The primary way of collecting information was performed by the servers of the company Aumentha (an ad hoc study for this research), where 935 Twitter users were monitored during the period from 1 to 29 of November, including the election campaign attended from day 9 to November 23.

- Pre-Election and Post-Election Survey. To encourage the participation of 935 Twitter users in these surveys, a profile on Twitter @estudiUCM was created. A daily account management followed these users and invited them to participate in the surveys; also this Twitter account published daily information and interactions (Community Management). These online surveys were created in the domains <http://elections20.com/estudioucm/index-inicial.htm> (from November 1, 2012 until the day before the election, November 24) and <http://elections20.com/estudioucm/> (from November 26 2012 to December 9).

In addition to the survey and the analysis of Twitter users, three conditions were also analyzed on the campaign trail: the influence of the media, the speech of the candidates and their Twitter profiles. The candidates are:

- Artur Mas, CIU.
- Pere Navarro, PSC.
- Alicia Sánchez-Camacho, PP.
- Oriol Junqueras, ERC-Cat Sí.
- Joan Herrera, ICV-EUiA.

- Albert Rivera, C's.
- Alfons López Tena, SI.

The results show a tendency of the vote where ERC would increase considerably in votes above CIU, taking into account the factors of influence of the media during the election campaign, the messages and the election program of the candidates and political parties; and the activity on Twitter. Artur Mas is the candidate most affected by the pressure on the media, this fact distorts his message about independence, he bets for his base voters. For example, he doesn't have a Twitter account. The results obtained in the elections are 50 seats, a far distant from those results estimated by the published surveys. ERC is the ultimate beneficiary of the news about alleged corruption of CIU, a message clearly in favor of the independence of Catalunya and a winning management strategy in digital marketing, especially in the social media discourse. Oriol Junqueras is the most influential candidate, he won 21 seats, beating all the surveys published.

The Quantitative Analysis.

According to the pre-election survey (352 responses) (compared with the 135 seats of the Catalan Parliament), ERC wins 44 or 45 seats (21 in the 2012 elections), CIU gets 23 or 24 seats (50 in 2012), PSC 4 or 5 Members (20 in 2012), PP 2 or 3 members (19 in 2012), ICV-EUiA 9 or 10 (13 in 2012), C's 8 (9 in 2012) and SI 23 (0 in 2012). Note that the majority of respondents vote in favor of the independence of Catalonia, if a consultation or referendum is called.

According to the post-election survey (313 responses), ERC wins 52 or 53 seats (21 in the 2012 elections), CIU wins 25 or 26 seats (50 in 2012), PSC gets 9 or 10 seats (20 in 2012), PP 2 or 3 Members (19 in 2012), ICV-EUiA 8 (13 in 2012), C's 8 (9 in 2012), SI 8 (0 in 2012) and CUP 13 or 14 (3 in 2012). As we see there is an absolute disparity with the results of the elections on November 25, but these results are more similar to the barometer of the vote of the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió (CEO 2013) where ERC would win the election gaining between 37 and 39 members, CiU 34 to 36 deputies, C's between 15 and 17 seats, the PSC between 14 and 16 seats, PPC 13 or 14, ICV-EUiA between 12 and 14, and CUP 6 or 7. The majority of respondents would be in favor of Catalunya as a state of the European Union.

The winner would be ERC or Esquerra Republicana. Note the emergence of CUP. The pre-election and post-election surveys confirm the voting trend based on the opportunity that minority parties have. This fact is because of a bottom up political communication, with the

Internet as tool for flexible strategies without editorial control with a one way communication that encourages online activism, the mobilization and the commitment of its voters.

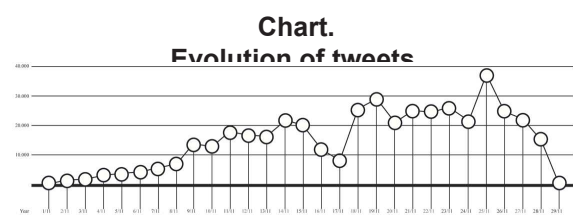
Regarding the influence Twitter had on the vote of the users, according to most respondents, the majority of information published during the election campaign on Twitter about politicians, candidates and others reaffirmed the vote, only a minority doubts about their intention to vote upon the information posted on Twitter. For them Twitter is a support for broadcast information like the television. Twitter influenced less than half of the respondents. Therefore, Twitter is a tool that reinforces the intention and the direction of the vote, behaving more like a communication support for candidates and political parties, and a tool for interaction between users because they use frequently this social networking site.

The main use of Twitter by the respondents is to publish personal tweets with the hashtag #25N, posting tweets of personal information and to communicate with friends and strangers. During the election campaign Twitter was used as a tool for self-expression, as a tool for political communication and to mobilize. The respondents estimate that Twitter was influential in the election campaign, also in changing political attitudes and the vote. They think Twitter is a tool for estimating the vote. In conclusion, Twitter is considered a new medium of communication and policy dissemination whose advantage is the interaction between the candidates or political parties with users and between users, because its strength is to be a medium that allows free speech in political communication, reinforcing the vote and conditioning it.

The Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis, and Evolution.

The analysis is based on the evolution of the tweets posted by a sample of 935 users. This analysis is an ad hoc study made by Aumentha and the members of this research.

- Some data obtained from the analysis are the record number, 445,361 tweets were posted:



Source: Aumentha.

- Most used tools and number of tweets posted:

Web: 139,446
 Twitter for Android: 100,279
 Twitter for iPhone: 77,712
 Twitter for BlackBerry®: 31.638
 Twitter for iPad: 20,531
 - Most popular users and number of mentions.
 @junqueras: 43,875
 @ciu: 31,264
 @solidaritatcat: 28,670
 - Most used hashtags and number of times used.
 #25N: 197,972
 #debattv3: 57,313
 #totsambelpresident: 27,730

Analysis of the tweets.

The activity of the 935 monitored Twitter users is analyzed. The analysis of the tweets is done taking into account the influence of the media, especially the days 16, 17 and 20 of November of 2012, when the newspaper El Mundopublished several articles about the corruption in CIU, the ruling party in Catalunya, who is pressing the Spanish institutions for the independence of Catalunya. The articles are "Police linked accounts of Mas and Pujolin Switzerland with the corruption of CIU"(2012), "The Pujol family have 137 million euros in Geneva, according to the Police"(2012) and "Hacienda investigates the Mas family account in Switzerland"(2012). Also it is taken into account the debate of the 7 major candidates in the Catalan television TV3. After a first analysis, due to the cancellation of 7 user accounts on Twitter, 928 users are analyzed. All those profiles that are public figures, politicians or fake profiles were removed, so 842 valid profiles are semantically analyzed. After every tweet of every user is semantically analyzed, the conclusions of the Twitter users are:

- Men664. Women158. NK/NR 19.
- Political Tendency: Center 11, Right-Center 1, Right 141, Transversalism 93, Left 596.
- Independence of Catalunya: Yes 766, No 37, NK/ NR 39.
- Direction of the vote according to the semantic analysis:

Chart 3.

Direction of the vote according to the semantic analysis.

| Political Party | Initial Vote | N16 | N17 | N18 | N20 | N25 |
|-----------------|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| ERC | 136 | 141 | 147 | 171 | 181 | 247 |
| CUP | 94 | 97 | 97 | 101 | 107 | 121 |
| CIU | 90 | 85 | 91 | 95 | 101 | 123 |
| SI | 73 | 79 | 80 | 85 | 83 | 97 |
| PSC | 50 | 44 | 45 | 44 | 45 | 47 |
| ICV-EUiA | 31 | 30 | 31 | 33 | 35 | 45 |
| C's | 13 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 13 | 16 |
| Pirata | 11 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 |
| PPC | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Pacma | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| RCat | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| NEC | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| UPyD | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| NK/NR | 339 | 337 | 324 | 284 | 261 | 129 |

Source: compiled by the author.

Chart 4.

A comparison of seats among the post-election survey, the average of polls published in 2013, the average of pre-election polls published, the results of the elections to the Catalan Parliament in 2010 and 2012, the final results of the elections to the Catalan Parliament in 2010 and 2012, and the analysis of the initial and final vote on Twitter.

| Number of Seats | Post-electoral Survey | Polls 2013 (arithmetic mean) | Polls 2012 (arithmetic mean) | Election Results 2012 | Election Results 2010 | Twitter Initial Vote | Twitter Final Vote |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 135 | | | | | | | |
| CIU | 25-26 | 35-36 | 64-65 | 50 | 62 | 14 | 20 |
| ERC-Cat SI | 52-53 | 37 | 16-17 | 21 | 10 | 22 | 39-40 |
| PSC | 9-10 | 15-16 | 18-19 | 20 | 28 | 8 | 7-8 |
| PPC | 2-3 | 14-15 | 19 | 19 | 18 | 0-1 | 0-1 |
| ICV-EUiA | 8 | 13-14 | 15-16 | 13 | 10 | 5 | 7 |
| C's | 8 | 16-17 | 17-18 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 2-3 |
| CUP | 13-14 | 9-10 | 2 | 3 | - | 15 | 19 |
| SI | 8 | - | 0-1 | 0 | 4 | 12 | 15-16 |
| Pirata | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| PACMA | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| RCAT | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| NEC | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| UPyD | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| NK/NR | - | - | - | - | - | 54 | 20-21 |

Source: compiled by the author.

Twitter increased by 18% in account users, and its use increased from 2010 to 2011, in 2012 it had over 500 million users worldwide and 5 million in Spain (Twitter, 2012). 2013 closes with Spain as a third country in the world with the highest penetration (PeerReach, 2014) and a 42% increase in the use of this social networking website (The Cocktail Analysis, 2013). Twitter is a microblogging social network, which runs through communication and sharing messages of 140 characters per tweet (Clemente, 2011). Each tweet

will be embedded in a software package that takes up 10 or 12 times more than the message itself. This is the metadata: data containing valuable information about who, how, when and where the tweet was originated. A great opportunity for data mining and especially for corporates, advertising agencies and marketing research. Twitter has great potential as a source of data mining that is why many researchers have created their own measuring tools or research. There are subsidiaries of Twitter such as Crimson Hexagon or Mediasift, they have a contract with Twitter to access the metadata of this social network through Twitter API, and extract extremely rich information for marketing, or other business/research. Twitter, like other social networking sites, was created to facilitate global communication among the citizens of the world, but they have an area of business based on the information obtained from its users to revert it in marketing strategies for the company or for others (Clemente, 2011; O'Brien, 2012; Barrett, 2010; Andrews, 2012), following bidding practices or circumventing privacy through contract clauses that you agree to register a profile on them. Twitter tenders these privacy practices and circumvents the privacy of the user by the contract clauses that the user agrees when registering. The analysis of the data concluded from Twitter, compared to the average of the surveys, shows certain findings. Twitter predicts the rising of ERC as the most voted party against the lowering overall of CIU. If the results of the analysis of Twitter are compared with the actual results of the elections of 2012, the hypothesis 1 (H1) **Twitter predicts actual trends in society is confirmed**, comparing the variation with the average of the surveys and barometers of 2013.

According to Bond, Fariss & Jones (2012) the online political mobilization works because it induces to the free expression and it also induces to the collection of information and the validation of the vote. Moreover Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt (2010) conclude, regarding the social networking sites, that a person who receives a positive influence in his circle or close group of people about an electoral participation or voter turnout, the likelihood of voting increases. According to different studies (ONTSI, 2012; The Cocktail Analysis, 2012; The Cocktail Analysis, 2013; IAB, 2012; IAB 2013), the users use the social networking sites as tools of influence, a medium to express themselves (35% of users), a vehicle for awareness/mobilization of the civil society with a frequency of very common to quite often 18%; this activity did not exist in 2009 and 2010. Twitter is the social network with more use for social mobilization to support a political

call, 12% use it to express themselves freely or promote/support social or charitable causes. It is the preferred social network for personal expression (20% of users) (The Cocktail Analysis, 2013). Therefore, the users of the social networking sites use them as a communication tool, not only to interact or communicate, but they use them for two-way communication allowing them to be present in a globalized world, influencing events directly, recommending and reviewing all kinds of global and local issues. This democratization of influence is because the growth of the social networks as tools of mobilization, expression, social and political awareness; and Twitter is the social network chosen for it. Regarding the analysis of the data extracted from Twitter for estimating the vote, it should be mentioned two important facts: the technological split in society and the minority parties. Referring to the digital divide, division, or penetration of these technological media in society, it should be emphasized that the analysis of the Twitter users shows that CUP and SI obtain more seats than the real results. This factor is because most people do not have an active Twitter profile, and those who have it tend to support and mobilize for minority parties who use the social networks as an important campaign tool because of its bidirectional communication, low cost, no editorial control, one way, flexible, many to many, bottom up, accessible, near the young voter, acquisition and retention of voter protest of fundraising, cyber activism, Democracy 2.0. Ultimately, the political mobilization on Twitter works because it induces both the users and policy makers to the free expression. So, the hypothesis 2 (H2) **Twitter mobilizes politically active users, is confirmed**.

The most relevant research in Democracy 2.0 and Government 2.0 (in relation to political and social networking sites, especially Twitter) is divided into 7 categories: influence, mobilization, sentiment, data, credibility, prediction and policy investigation into events that occurred in different countries and institutions. Within the political prediction research, there are investigations focused on Twitter or the social media as tools of political prediction. Some researchers refute the hypothesis of Twitter as a tool of political prediction (Gayo-Avello, 2011; Jungherr, Jürgens & Schoen, 2011; Mustafaraj & Chung, 2011) and other researchers corroborate it (Tumasjan et al, 2011; Asur & Huberman, 2010; Sang & Bos, 2012; O'Connor et al, 2010). The results of the methodology applied to the Catalan Parliament elections of November 25, 2012, regarding the analysis of the tweets of 842 users **refute** the hypothesis 3 (H3), **Twitter is a**

tool for estimating the vote, mainly because of the digital divide and influence of minor parties.

In conclusion, Twitter predicts actual trends in society supporting the thesis of Birmingham & Smeaton (2012), Bollen, Pepe & Mao (2010), O'Connor et al (2010), André et al (2012), Mislove et al (2011), Jansen et al (2009), Weng et al (2012). Twitter mobilizes politically active users, confirming the hypotheses of Artusi & Maurizzi (2010), Mylona (2008), Ward (2003), Lusoli, Ward & Gibson (2002, 2006), Anduiza (2009), Gibson & Rommele (2008), Lance Bennett, Breunig & Givens (2008), Gibson, Ward & Lusoli (2002), Artusi & Maurizzi (2010), Vaccari (2008), Kyf (2006), Bimber & Davis (2003), Blais, Gidengil & Nevitte (2004), Leppäniemi et al (2010), Norris (2003), Bond, Fariss & Jones (2012), Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt (2010). Twitter is a tool for estimating the vote, supports the thesis of Gayo-Avello (2011), Jungherr, Jürgens & Schoen (2011), Chung & Mustafaraj (2011).

Limitations and future research.

The limitations found in this research are the digital divide (penetration), credibility (semantic analysis), to analyze a posteriori is not to estimate, the technology (research versus business) and the period between the election calls. Concerning future research, primarily the recommendation is to choose a group of Twitter users sufficiently large. It should be composed of active and non-politically active users, also it must be ensured they want to participate in a pre-election and post-election survey.

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Perceived value: A multidimensional explanatory construct of attitude towards

Private Labels

Abstract

Both marketing practitioners and academic researchers have traditionally recognized the major influence that perceived value has on consumer behavior. Despite a growing body of research, it is still not clear how value construct dimensions influence consumer attitude towards private Labels. The main objective of the present study is to explore the relations between perceived value dimensions and consumer attitude towards private labels. This goal is undertaken by providing a quantitative and confirmatory analysis conducted in grocery products category. The results we have achieved confirm the central role of perceived value as multidimensional construct in predicting PLs attitude. This study deepens understanding of consumer perceptions and behaviors relating to retailer's brand.

Keywords: Perceived value, quality, price, social value, emotional value, PLs attitude.

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1. Introduction

Professionals and academics are more and more interested in private labels (Baltas 2003). These brands have managed to expand retailers' horizons, to redirect producers' future and attract consumers' attention.

Many researchers have considered these brands from different perspectives. Quelch and Harding (1996) and Gomez Suarez (2005) took retailer's perspective to study the implications of private labels. Other researchers (Oubiña et al, 2006; Labrecque & Lemblé, 2000; Jean. C, 1998; Cadenat et al, 2007) have opted for the producer's perspective to examine the development process of private labels. Another research stream set the goal of identifying the consumer profile of retailer brands (Aouina & Bhatli 2014). Harcar et al (2006) argue that during the 1960s and 1970s most researches ranked private label consumers according to socio-economic, personality, shopping style and information variables. A more recent trend is interested in explaining consumer attitude towards retailer brands. In this regard, studies of (Richardson et al, 1995, 1996; Ailawadi et al 2001; Del Vecchio, 2001; Semeijn et al 2004, Glynn & Chen 2009, Kara et al 2009, Pandya & Joshi 2011, Sheau-Fen et al 2011) aimed to identify private labels attitude determinants.

Ailawadi et al (2001) and Byoungho Suth and Gu (2005) focused on consumer characteristics. They classified consumers into two groups: those with a favorable attitude towards retailer brands and those whose attitude is unfavorable. However, according to Myers (1967), private labels consumers are ranked according to perceptual variables rather than their demographic characteristics or personality traits. Baltas (2003) found out that age, family size, working time and sensitivity to promotions do not improve private labels purchasing proneness. Among the perceptual variables considered in predicting attitudes towards PLs, Zeithaml (1988), Dodds et al (1991); Sweeney et al (1999), Grewal et al (1998), Day (2002), Eggert & Ulaga (2002) and Kwon & Kwon (2008) agree that perceived value has a strong predictive power. Nevertheless, researches on retail brands attitude considered perceived value as a one-dimensional variable that only measures the functional value of private labels (Dodds et al 1991, Dick et al 1995, Grewal et al, 1998, Burton et al. 1998, Lichtenstein et al. 1993, Harcar et al 2006, Liljander et al 2009).

Since their emergence, private labels have continued to progress and enter new categories. In terms of products, PLs' evolution reached three

main areas, namely, price, quality and innovation. Hoch & Benarji (1993), Jean (1998) and Dunne & Narasimhan (1999) argue that initially PLs have focused on price by making it the single positioning axis offering "Cheap satisfactory quality" products and imitations of major brands (me too products). In 1996, Quelch & Harding claimed that while maintaining lower prices, retailers have focused on quality and since the 1990s they have been successful in offering the same quality as that of national brands. Laaksonen & Reynolds (1994) suggest four generations of PLs, each with important differences in terms of product, technology, market position and consumer motivation.

Private labels have acquired the full status of brands (Breton 2004), and consumers assess their value based on hedonic and other utilitarian factors, we propose to examine whether the emotional and social dimensions when added to functional dimensions (Sweeney & Soutar 2001) contribute to the formation of attitude towards retail brands.

Our research question is the following:

Do the emotional, social and functional dimensions of perceived value contribute in predicting private labels attitude?

The next section presents the literature review of perceived value and its effect on private label attitude. Then, we present the research method. The results section presents our findings from the confirmatory study and highlights the ability of different perceived value dimensions to predict retail brand attitude. The conclusive section encompasses managerial implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

In the literature, two approaches were used to measure perceived value. The first approach considers perceived value as a one-dimensional construct (Teas and Agarwal, 2002; Brady and Robertson, 1999; Chang and Wildt, 1994; Dodds, 1991; Hartline and Jones, 1996; Kerin et al., 1992; Sweeney et al, 1999, Dahlén et al 2009).

The second approach advocates that perceived value is a complex construct, consisting of several dimensions (Babin et al., 1994; Holbrook, 1994, 1999; Huber et al., 2000; Mattsson, 1991; Sheth et al, 1991a.; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Williams and Soutar, 2000).

In this study, perceived value will be considered as multidimensional and the measurement scale of Sweeney & Soutar (2001) will be adopted.

2.1 Perceived value, a complex construct

Zeithaml (1988) defines perceived value as “an overall assessment of the utility of the product, based on perceptions of what is received and what is given”. This definition has been widely adopted by researchers working on topics directly or indirectly integrating the concept of perceived value.

Monore (1990) uses the quality-price ratio to judge value. Woodruff (1997) proposes to define perceived value as “a preference and an assessment, made by the customer, of product attributes (or experience), its performance and the consequences of its use (or his experience), facilitating or blocking the goals and objectives that the individual wants to achieve in usage situations”.

Although the concept of value is central in marketing, a real conceptual confusion can be observed. First, perceived value is often confused with other concepts such as perceived quality or satisfaction. To avoid confusion, Zeithaml (1988) clarifies that perceived value is more individual and more personal than perceived quality. The author added that value includes the “get / give” ratio and perceived quality is only the “get” dimension in the value equation. Additionally, Parasuraman (1997) points to the difficulty in consensually defining “perceived value”. The author explains this by the ambiguity of the terms used to designate it (utility, profit, quality ...). Finally, Woodall (2003) identifies in the literature many terms used to describe the concept of “perceived value” among which we mention (Value for the customer, customer value, customer perceived value, subjective expected value, customer-valued quality, value consciousness ...).

2.2 Perceived value, a multidimensional construct

Babin et al (1994), Mano and Oliver (1993) and Seth et al (1991) classify perceived value in two categories: utilitarian and hedonic. Utilitarian value, called also functional or instrumental, uses a cognitive assessment. It is linked to the performance and utility of the product. However, hedonic or experiential value involves subjectivity and emotions.

Sanchez Fernandez & Iniesta Bonillo (2007) reviewed the literature on the conceptualization of perceived value. The authors consider both univariate and multivariate measures and found that the nature of the concept is multidimensional and that perceived value involves interaction between a consumer and a product. This value is

relative because of its comparative, personal, and situational. Value is preferential, perceptual and cognitive-affective in nature.

A list of studies that examined perceived value as a multidimensional construct is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Synthesis of the main research stream having considered the perceived value as a multidimensional construct

| Research stream | Contributions |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| The customer value hierarchy | Anitsal and Flint (2006); Overby et al. (2004); Overby et al. (2005); Parasuraman (1997); van der Haar et al.(2001); Woodruff (1997); Woodruff and Gardial (1996) |
| Utilitarian and hedonic | Babin and Attaway (2000); Babin and Babin (2001); Babin and Kim (2001); Babin et al. (1994); Chiu et al. (2005); Lee and Overby (2004) |
| Axiology or value theory | Danaher and Mattsson (1994, 1998); de Ruyter et al. (1997); Hartman (1967, 1973); Huber et al. (2000); Lemmink et al. (1998); Mattsson (1991) |
| Consumption-values theory | Pura (2005); Sheth et al. (1991a, 1991b); Sweeney and Soutar (2001); Sweeney et al. (1996); Williams and Soutar (2000); Wang et al. (2004) |
| Holbrook's typology of consumer value | Bevan and Murphy (2001); Bourdeau et al. (2002); Brown(1999); Holbrook (1994, 1996, 1999); Holbrook and Corfman (1985); Kim (2002); Leclerc and Schmitt (1999); Mathwick et al. (2001, 2002); Oliver (1996, 1999); Richins (1994, 1999); Smith (1996, 1999); Solomon (1999); Wagner (1999). |

Source: Fernandez & Iniesta Bonillo (2007 P.435)

Perceived value is one of the most used variables to predict attitude. It keeps the same explanatory power on retail brands attitude. However, previous research has focused on the functional value of PLs. To our knowledge, no research on these brands has attempted to assess the effects of other dimensions of perceived value on consumer attitude.

2.3 Perceived value and attitude towards private labels

Zeithaml (1988), Dodds et al (1991); Sweeney et al (1999), Grewal et al (1998), Day (2002), Li et al (2012), Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, (2012) and Vera & Trujillo (2013) agree that perceived value is a powerful predictor of consumer purchasing behavior as it considers consumers means and the quality they can allow to themselves. In retail brand research field, many studies have examined the effect of perceived value on attitude towards these brands. Burton et al (1998) argue that the consumer seeks to maximize (perceived quality/ price) ratio. This highlights the importance of perceived value which is found to significantly contribute, first, to better perceive retailer brands and also to better predict consumer attitude toward them. The pre-cited empirical research expected and confirmed the positive effect of perceived value on attitude towards PLs. Table 2 presents a selection of the main articles on the subject.

Table 2: Effect of perceived value on private labels attitude

| Authors | Study | Results |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Beneke et al (2013) | The influence of perceived product quality, relative price and risk, respectively, on perceived product value and, ultimately, consumers' willingness to buy private label household cleaning products. | Establishing a value perception is critical in the buying process. Tangible cues exhibiting high quality need profound attention. Furthermore, it is suggested that risk (which plays an important part in the consumer decision process) is minimised through optimal retail service quality and customer reassurances. |
| Harcar et al (2006) | Determination of variables (of the proposed model) influencing the purchase decision of PLs. | The results confirm the (positive) relationship between perceived value and perception of PLs. |
| Jin et Gu Suth (2005) | Effects of perceptual variables predicting the purchase of PLs | The perceived value has a significant predicting power of attitude towards private labels. |
| Garretson et al (2002) | Comparison between retailer and manufacturer's brands | Perceived value has a positive effect on PLs attitude. |
| Burton et al (1998) | Proposal for a measurement scale for the attitude towards private label and identification of behavioral and psychological variables related to this attitude. | The perceived value of PLs improves the attitude towards these brands. |
| Richardson et al (1996) | Comparison between retailer and manufacturer's brands | Perceived Value of PLs improves attitude towards them. |

With respect to research on PLs, the authors have focused on the utilitarian dimension of perceived value and treated the concept as one-dimensional. We propose to enrich our understanding of the effect of perceived value on attitude toward these private labels. To this end, we adopt the measurement scale of perceived value of (Sweeney & Soutar 2001) whose dimensions are described in Table 3.

| | |
|---|--|
| Emotional value | the utility derive from the feelings or affective states that a product generates. |
| Social value (enhancement of social self-concept) | the utility derived from the product's ability to enhance social self-concept. |
| Functional value (price/value for money) | the utility derived from the product due to the reduction of its perceived short term and longer term costs. |
| Functional value (performance/quality) | the utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of the product. |

Table 3: Description of the four dimensions of the perceived value Measurement Scale Sweeney & Soutar (2001)

The measurement scale of (Sweeney & Soutar 2001) was developed to be used in purchase situations, and in order to identify the dimensions of value that most influence purchase, attitude and consumer behavior. The four dimensions of perceived value have proven their ability to significantly contribute to explain attitude and behavior.

Building on research examining the effect of perceived value on attitude towards retailer brands and the results of the study of Sweeney & Soutar (2001) we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: Perceived value of private labels has a positive effect the attitude toward these brands.

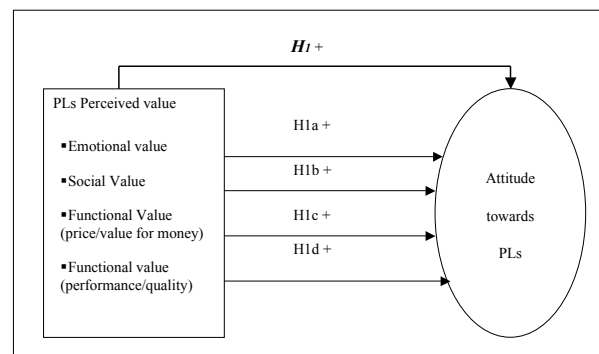
H1a: Emotional value of PLs positively influences attitude toward these brands.

H1b: Social value of PLs has a positive impact on attitude toward these brands.

H1c: Functional value (price/value of money) of PLs positively influences attitude toward these brands.

H1d: Functional value (performance/quality) of PLs has a positive impact on attitude toward these brands.

Below is a summary diagram of research hypotheses:

**Figure1: Conceptual model**

3. Research Method

The literature review allowed us to identify the relationships between the studied variables. Then, preliminary responses to our research question were subsequently made. To test these hypotheses, we adopted a research methodology based on a survey of customers of large retail stores. Grocery product category has been retained, and this for reasons that will be developed later. To conduct our survey, we developed a questionnaire to collect the information needed to examine our hypotheses and research problem.

3.1 Measures

The validation of our research hypotheses depends, in part, on the chosen measurement instruments. It is important to note that the used instruments were taken from the literature and have therefore been the subject of previous validation. The independent variable was measured using the scale of Sweeney & Soutar (2001) and the dependent variable (attitude towards private labels) was measured using the scale of Garretson et al (2002). All of these measures are taken back in Table 4.

Table 4 : Items list

Dependent variable : Attitude towards PLs

- When I buy a private label brand, I always feel that
- am getting a good deal.
- In general, PLs are of poor quality(*)

- I love it when private label brands are available for the product categories I purchase.
- I look for PLs when I am shopping
- Independant variables : Perceived value of PLs

Emotional dimension

- is one that I would enjoy
- would make me want to use it
- is one that I would feel relaxed about using
- would make me feel good
- would give me pleasure

Social dimension

- would help me to feel acceptable
- would improve the way I am perceived
- would make a good impression on other people
- would give its owner social approval

Price dimension

- is reasonably priced
- offers value for money
- is a good product for the price
- would be economical

Quality dimension

- has consistent quality
- is well made
- has an acceptable standard of quality
- has poor workmanship (*)
- would not last a long time (*)
- would perform consistently

3.2 Brand and product category choice

Selecting Carrefour in our study is justified by different criteria. First, Carrefour has been in Tunisia since 2001 and enjoys a good reputation and a significant market share. Second, the retailer offers a wide range of products under its own brand (food, hygiene, detergents, baby products, gardening items, kitchen utensils ...).

The choice of the product category is largely based on its continuous availability, its reasonable price as deemed by consumers and the number of private labels branded products available in this category. We have so opted for grocery products.

3.3 Data collection

After identifying the different measurement scales, selecting the brand and product category, we included these components into a questionnaire which is then administered to our sample. As a sampling method, we chose a convenience sample by default. Indeed, the choice of interviewees depended on their willingness to be part of the study. The survey was conducted from January 15 to 20, 2015. Interviewers are placed at various Carrefour Market stores (Tunis, Ariana, Manouba).

Consumers were approached at the entrance or exit of the store. Once they have agreed to collaborate, their interviewers explained the topic and gave them a 10-minute questionnaire to fill. A total of 250 questionnaires were collected. These were the primary data for our database.

3.4 Analytical procedures

To analyze the collected data and test our hypotheses, we used, first, a principal component analysis (PCA) and, in a second step, we used a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the validity of our measurement scales. The ability of independent variables to explain consumer attitude toward private labels is evaluated through structural equations method.

A- Principal component analysis and reliability estimates

The principal component analysis is used to study relationships between the different elements of each variable and examine the factor structure of items. Measurement of sampling adequacy is satisfactory. The data is internally coherent and can therefore be subject of a factor analysis. With reference to Table 5, which describes the results of our (PCA), we can conclude that representation quality is good for all the items that make up the construct, indicating that they measure appropriately the concerned factor. The reliability test resulted in Cronbach's alpha values above 0.9.

Table 5: Synthesis of purified Measures

| Variables | Items | Loading | | | | Reliability |
|------------------------|--|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| | | Axis 1 | Axis2 | Axis3 | Axis4 | |
| Perceived value of PLs | Emotional value | emot1 | 0,865 | | | □ =0,946 |
| | | emot2 | 0,819 | | | |
| | | emot3 | 0,809 | | | |
| | | emot4 | 0,763 | | | |
| | | emot5 | 0,677 | | | |
| | Social value | social1 | | | 0,757 | □ =0,917 |
| | | social2 | | | 0,858 | |
| | | social3 | | | 0,868 | |
| | | social4 | | | 0,855 | |
| | Functional value (price/value money) | prxval1 | 0,826 | | | □ =0,915 |
| | | prxval2 | 0,823 | | | |
| | | prxval3 | 0,786 | | | |
| | | prxval4 | 0,849 | | | |
| | Functional value (performance/quality) | perqua1 | | 0,758 | | □ =0,920 |
| | | perqua2 | | 0,755 | | |
| | | perqua3 | | 0,833 | | |
| | | perqua4 | | 0,729 | | |
| | | perqua5 | | 0,668 | | |
| | | perqua6 | | 0,702 | | |
| PLs attitude | PLsatt1 | 0,917 | | | | □ =0,911 |
| | PLsatt2 | 0,887 | | | | |
| | PLsatt3 | 0,915 | | | | |
| | PLsatt4 | 0,837 | | | | |

B- Confirmatory factor analysis

After the Exploratory Factorial Analysis (EFA) through a (PCA), we checked the results using a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). These tests were performed using Amos (18) according to a

maximum likelihood estimation procedure. Table 6 presents the results of (CFA).

The results of the confirmatory analysis indicate that convergent validity conditions are satisfied for the different constructs because their internal consistency coefficient (Rho Jöreskog) scores high values and average variance extracted is above 0.5. Thus, the indicators used to measure each of the constructs seem to be correlated and therefore converge as indicated by the different values of reliability or variance between the construct and the items forming it.

Table 6: CFA results

| | | | Grocery products | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------|------------------|--------|---------------|---------------|
| Variables | | Items | α_i | CR | α_{vc} | α_{vc} |
| Perceived value of PL | Emotional value | emot1 | 0.765 | - | 0.940 | 0.606 |
| | | emot3 | 0.789 | 15.282 | | |
| | | emot5 | 0.949 | 14.290 | | |
| | Social value | social1 | 0.785 | - | 0.914 | 0.669 |
| | | social2 | 0.931 | 16.977 | | |
| | | social3 | 0.910 | 16.536 | | |
| | | social4 | 0.805 | 14.480 | | |
| | Functional value (price/value for money) | prxval1 | 0.800 | - | 0.906 | 0.728 |
| | | prxval2 | 0.904 | 16.677 | | |
| | | prxval3 | 0.893 | 16.437 | | |
| | | prxval4 | 0.814 | 14.480 | | |
| | Functional value (performance/quality) | perqual | 0.829 | - | 0.920 | 0.654 |
| perqua3 | | 0.862 | 15.865 | | | |
| perqua5 | | 0.732 | 11.258 | | | |
| perqua6 | | 0.828 | 14.041 | | | |
| PLs attitude | PLsat1 | 0.863 | - | 0.909 | 0.658 | |
| | PLsat2 | 0.930 | 22.635 | | | |
| | PLsat3 | 0.868 | 20.048 | | | |
| | PLsat4 | 0.850 | 19.286 | | | |

C- Global model validation

Fit indices such as absolute measurement indices (Chi-square, Chi-square/degrees of freedom, RMR, GFI, AGFI and RMSEA) and incremental measurement indices (TLI and CFI) were assessed. Rho of Joreskog values exceed 0.9. This confirms the reliability of our measurements. We also note that all *Rho cv* values are greater than 0.5, which point to the convergent validity of the adopted measures.

To check discriminant validity of the scale 'perceived value of private labels', we compared the average of *Rho cv* (ie 0.660) to the squares of inter factor correlations. All values displayed in the inter factor correlation matrices are below the averages of *Rho cv* which guarantee discriminant validity of our measurements (see Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7: Global model estimation

| | | | Grocery products | | | |
|------------------------|--|----------|------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| Variables | | Items | □i | CR | □ | □ vc |
| Perceived value of PLs | Emotional value | emot1 | 0,765 | - | | |
| | | emot3 | 0,789 | 15,282 | | |
| | | emot5 | 0,949 | 14,290 | 0,936 | 0,611 |
| | Social value | social1 | 0,785 | - | | |
| | | social2 | 0,931 | 16,977 | 0,910 | 0,674 |
| | | social3 | 0,910 | 16,536 | | |
| | | social4 | 0,805 | 14,067 | | |
| | Functional value (price/value for money) | prixval1 | 0,800 | - | | |
| | | prixval2 | 0,904 | 16,677 | | |
| | | prixval3 | 0,893 | 16,437 | 0,905 | 0,701 |
| | | prixval4 | 0,814 | 14,480 | | |
| | Functional value (performance/quality) | perqual | 0,829 | - | | |
| perqua3 | | 0,862 | 15,865 | | | |
| perqua5 | | 0,732 | 11,258 | 0,917 | 0,654 | |
| perqua6 | | 0,828 | 15,865 | | | |
| PLs attitude | | PL.satt1 | 0,910 | - | | |
| | | PL.satt2 | 0,863 | 19,871 | | |
| | | PL.satt3 | 0,858 | 19,630 | 0,908 | 0,665 |
| | | PL.satt4 | 0,772 | 15,937 | | |

Table 8: Interfactorial correlation matrix

| | Emotional value | Social value | Functional value (price/value for money) | Functional value (performance/quality) | PLs attitude |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|--------------|
| Emotional value | 1 | | | | |
| Social value | $\Phi=0,123$ $\Phi^2=0,0151$ | 1 | | | |
| Functional value (price/value for money) | $\Phi=-0,056$ $\Phi^2=0,0031$ | $\Phi=-0,015$ $\Phi^2=0,0002$ | 1 | | |
| Functional value (performance/quality) | $\Phi=0,419$ $\Phi^2=0,1755$ | $\Phi=0,298$ $\Phi^2=0,0888$ | $\Phi=-0,615$ $\Phi^2=0,378$ | 1 | |
| PLs attitude | $\Phi=-0,016$ $\Phi^2=0,0003$ | $\Phi=-0,027$ $\Phi^2=0,0007$ | $\Phi=0,084$ $\Phi^2=0,007$ | $\Phi=-0,122$ $\Phi^2=0,015$ | 1 |

Variance explained by the model (GFI) and variance explained by taking into account the number of degrees of freedom are satisfactory (GFI = 0.911 and AGFI = 0.900). Incremental indices (CFI and TLI NFI) all have values very close to 1. RMR value is close to 0, therefore the model represents appropriately the data. The value of RMSEA is $0.051 < 0.08$. In sum, the various calculated indices are satisfactory and we can conclude about the good fit of the proposed model as recommended by Roussel et al. (2002) (see Table 9). This fit can be considered sufficient to interpret the results.

Table 9: Adjustment Indices of the structural model

| | X^2/ddl | GFI | AGFI | RMR | RMSEA | TLI | NFI | CFI |
|------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grocery products | 2,410 | 0,911 | 0,900 | 0,057 | 0,051 | 0,950 | 0,937 | 0,962 |

4. Results

The results of the effects of perceived value dimensions on attitude towards PLs show that three out of four relationships are significant.

Emotional value of private labels contributes in explaining attitude towards Carrefour's branded products with a t-test of (8.015). Hypothesis H1a is then validated. This result confirms that PLs are evolving and improving their positioning in

consumer's mind. Retailers' efforts to ameliorate quality innovate and integrate new product categories while maintaining consumer purchasing power have been shown to be successful and has led consumers to express emotions towards private labels.

Table10: Results of the structural model

| | γ | SE | CR | P | Results |
|---|----------|-------|--------|-------|----------|
| H1a: Emotional value \rightarrow PLs attitude | 0.392 | 0,049 | 8,015 | 0,000 | retained |
| H1b: Social value \rightarrow PLs attitude | -0,038 | 0,047 | -0,809 | 0,419 | rejected |
| H1c: Price/value of money \rightarrow PLs attitude | 0,630 | 0,064 | 9,829 | 0,000 | retained |
| H1d: Performance /quality \rightarrow PLs attitude | 0,346 | 0,053 | 6,545 | 0,000 | retained |

Social value of private labels has no significant effect on attitude toward these brands (CR = -0.809). Thus, hypothesis **H1b** is rejected. This means that retailer brands do not help the consumer to improve self-concept in society. This might result from a failure in communicating about PLs and the fragility of their image. This may also have cultural roots, since, as explained by De Mooij and Hofstede (2002), retailer brands acceptability rates are higher in individualistic cultures than in collectivist ones. This might result from the fact those consumers whose culture is collectivist refer more than others to the extrinsic characteristics of the product (packaging, advertising, brand image ...). These external attributes are still the weakness of PLs.

Functional value (price / value of money) is the dimension that has the most important effect on attitude towards retailer brands, with a significant T-test of (9,829). Hypothesis **H1c** is then retained. Indeed, PLs are often positioned at a lower price than manufacturer brands (Akday Davies & Jones 2005 and 1998) and a comparable level of quality. PLs help then optimize consumer purchasing power and fight against inflation (Breton 2004).

Functional value (performance/quality) contributes significantly in predicting attitude towards PLs, with a T-test of (6.545). Hypothesis **H1d** is then retained.

In fact, retailers have continued to improve the quality of their brands and impose increasingly demanding norms on their suppliers. Retailer brands reached a level of quality comparable to that of manufacturers' brands.

The results we reached point to the importance of perceived value as a multidimensional construct in predicting attitude towards private labels. The significant contributions of emotional value, and functional values (price / value for money and performance / quality) in the formation of attitudes towards these brands lead us to conclude that

hypothesis **H1**, which states that "perceived value of PLs improves the attitude toward these brands" is partially confirmed.

5. Conclusion

Despite the multitude of research on private labels and more particularly on the effect of perceived value on attitude towards these brands, few or no authors considered perceived value as a multidimensional variable. Thus, this study has contributed to the literature by providing a deeper and more detailed consideration of the impact of perceived value on attitude towards retailer brands.

We found that emotional and functional values of PLs (price / value of money and performance / quality) may predict attitude towards these brands. This result points to the development of retailer brand and improves its positioning in consumer mind.

Social value of retailer brands had no significant impact on consumer attitude. This could be because of the fragility of PLs image and invites retailers to rethink their communication strategies. According to Sweeney and Soutar (2001) "Consumer perceived value should be seen as part of an ongoing process of maintaining a relationship between manufacturer and retailer with a given customer". Thus, to improve perceived value, both partners (manufacturer and retailer) are called to organize and harmonize their actions.

Our study shows that multiple value dimensions explain consumer choice better, than does a single 'value for money' item and should produce superior results when investigating consumption value.

5.1 Discussion and Implications

The contributions of our research are applicable mainly in the field of consumer behavior with private label brands. The results obtained allow firstly, to better understanding the most receptive consumers and secondly, to guide the creative process of advertising in order to better reach the target.

Perceived Value is often regarded as the cornerstone of building consumer relationship with retailer brands. Indeed, by improving its perceived value, private label would enhance both brand and store loyalty (Corstjens et al. 2000, et Steenkamp et Dekimpe, 1997).

Appreciating perceived value dimensions' effect on own brands attitude would allow retailers to admit the weight of the different dimensions of perceived value and subsequently to better position their brands by developing more sophisticated positioning

strategies. Our results show the importance of emotional value on consumer's willingness to buy PLs in the grocery product category normally considered as functionally oriented. This has substantial implications for marketing strategy. Such conditions illustrate the opportunity for retail strategists to explore all dimensions of customer value before deciding on an appropriate market approach.

These results allow us to make recommendations to retailers. On the one hand, retailers are aware that communicating about social value of private label is profitable, particularly in the context of building and maintaining relationship with consumers. On the other hand, this approach improves retailers' image and reputation by strengthening their role as a responsible social actor.

Identification of emotional value sensitive consumers can form the basis of a market segmentation strategy. Distributors could identify the segment to be targeted by various marketing activities to promote their private labels with emotional value and thus ensure a better effect on their shares.

Some difficulties were encountered, resulting in limitations that should be considered. Considering grocery product category could limit the impact of social and emotional dimensions of perceived value. Thus, conducting the same study in other categories will help to better assess the weight of each dimension.

In terms of future research implications, it seems that additional countries need to be considered to permit a triangularization of internal and external results. Indeed, Steenkamp et al (2006) argue that consumer value may vary across countries. It would be also interesting to study the effect of perceived value on attitude towards PLs of other stores and on the different types of retailer brands to further refine our understanding of the concept and generalize the obtained results.

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Non-linearity of Business Relationship Formation: the case of Antrox-Nel Design.

Abstract.

In this study we adopt an industrial network perspective – as developed by IMP scholars– to investigate the process of business relationship development in a b2b setting. Business relationship creation and development constitutes a promising research area within the industrial marketing domain and it is still unexplored. Empirically, we refer to the case of two Italian companies, named Antrox and Nel Design which few years ago started collaborating to develop a new product. Antrox commercializes tailored lighting solutions, whereas Nel Design is specialized in polystyrene carving. Methodologically, we adopt a qualitative research approach based on case study. Our data have been collected between 2013 and 2014 by means of face-to-face interviews, participant observations and secondary sources. The article sheds light on the factors that facilitated, and on those that inhibited, the beginning and further development of the business relationships. We emphasize how the openness of collaboration takes place under complex dynamics of interactions. Moreover, our results clearly identify the non-linearity and not predictability of the process due to presence of strong interdependences among the involved actors.

Keywords: business relationship beginning, b2b, interdependences, industrial networks.

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1. Introduction.

Every company is involved in complex business relationships that evolve over time. Especially in industrial markets, companies have stable, long-term relationships that require substantial commitment between the parties (Ford et al. 1998). The Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP Group, www.impgroup.org) consider B2B markets as complex network settings.

Business landscapes are shaped by the interactions that take place between firms: *"business relationships are built from interaction processes and are embedded in their counterparts' context, which takes the shape of a network"* (Håkansson and Snehota, 2000: 69). This is the so-called "Industrial Network Approach", where companies and their relationships are part of a complex network of interconnected relationships (Håkansson and Johansson, 1992). The network shapes relationships and relationships shape the network: in a network, firms are interdependent.

A business relationship is an interactive exchange relationship made of economic and social elements between two organizations. It links activities, resources and actors (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). A business relationship may affect the way a company performs its activities. Indeed certain technical, commercial or administrative activities between the company and the counterpart may become linked. As stated by Håkansson and Snehota, 1995: 29: "by linking the activities of a company with those of its counterparts, the company's performance is affected because of the effects either on its own activity structure or on the activity structure of the counterpart". The formation of a new relationship may also establish resource ties between the two companies, as a way to acquire and access tangible and intangible resources or as a way to confront and combine them. Finally, business relationships involve the formation of bonds between actors, as reciprocal interest and commitment arise. Actor bonds are able to affect the behavior and the identities of the companies involved. There is a constant interplay between actor bonds, activity links and resource ties, as the three layers become mutually adjusted. This interplay acts as a driving force in the development of business relationships.

Business relationships evolve during various stages. In literature, there are several models. Each model considers the evolving of business relationship as a time-bound process, even if the stages are differently defined (Mandjak et al., 2015). Management literature investigated deeply already established relationships, paying

less attention to the study of the pre-relationship stage or to the relationship building process. This gap can be explained as the start of a business relationship is sometimes a blurred phase (Holmen and Pedersen, 2001; Aarika-Stenroos, 2008; Edvardsson et al., 2008). Entrepreneurs and business are all different; there is none well-worn route. The process behind any new business relationship is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon (Gartner, 1985). However, the pre-relationship stage is perhaps the most critical phase in a relationship cycle, as it is here that companies evaluate the attributes of potential partners and try to predict future outcomes. In this phase, the risk of never transforming in a relationship is high. As stated by Ford: (1980: 339) *"relationships can fail to develop or regress depending upon the actions of either party or of competing buyers or sellers"*, but this is also the moment when companies could get advantage of big opportunities, if they are able to see them, or, similarly, to underrate risks if they get an erroneous perception. The overall research question of this article focuses on investigating the process by which business relationships take place. How do business relationships begin? What are the conditions that favor, or act as obstacles, to the formation of a new business relationship? Is the business formation process predictable by the parties? The paper is organized as follows: firstly, the Industrial Network approach about business-to-business markets is presented; secondly, we introduce a brief theoretical summary about business relationship beginning; then we analyze in detail the companies involved in our case study and the interactions that gave birth to their business relationships. We illustrate the findings and propose a discussion on the topic.

2. Business relationships as conceived by the IMP Group

Organizations typically operate in a relational context and their survival and performance often depend upon their interconnectedness with other organizations. According to the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP) research, no company operates without relying on other entities. B2B companies have to leverage the skills and resources of other organizations. As stated by Ford et al.: (2011: 3) *"each company in the business world is interdependent with many others"*. Companies do not just compete with others; they interact with their counterparts. No business exists in isolation; they are all connected to others in a network, across the business landscape. Furthermore, no company can completely control its counterparts; each business relationship is embedded in a network and *"cannot*

be wholly managed by just one of the companies involved in it" (Ford et al., 2011: 5). Companies get in touch with each other by means of interactions between actors, activities and resources. Business relationships are not just about the transaction of products; they also concern economic and social elements. Business relationships are perhaps one of the most important attributes a firm has. The interdependences developed within their most important relationships, define a company's position in a network of other relationships. As stated by Ford et al.: (2011: 10) *"A network position consists of its set of relationships and the benefits, restrictions, obligations and reputation that it has acquired through its unique interactions with those relationships. Each company's network position is affected by changes in those around it. The position is not solely the result of a company's strategy"*. Business relationships evolve during various stages. According to Ford (1980), they typically move into four stages: the pre-relationship stage; the exploratory stage; the developing stage and the stable stage. It is important to underline that not all relationships move into each of these stages in a predetermined manner. Many fail to develop after an initial contact, others are short-lived, and others will last for decades. Nevertheless, the management of a business relationship is not a linear process, where the parties can move consciously towards an ideal state. As stated by Ford et al. (2011: 30): *"managing relationships assets is about coping with different circumstances at different times with varying aims, expectations and ways of dealing with each other by both companies, some of which will be constructive and some of which will only damage the relationship"*. Wilson (1995) uses a different categorization; in his model, the stages are: partner selection, defining purpose, setting of relationship boundaries, creating relationship value and relationship maintenance. Dwyer et al. (1987) formulated a four-step model: awareness, exploration, expansion and commitment. Larson (1992) proposed a three-step classification: pre-conditions defining, building conditions specifying, integration and control. Levinger (1980) projected a five-step model: initial attraction, relationship building, continuation, deterioration and ending. This paper focuses on how business relationships are originated and develop over time. Even if categorized differently, all the models underline the importance of the first stage, where the parties start to think about creating a possible business relationship.

3. Relationships initiation.

The first stage of relationship development

is usually characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity. Companies wonder about risks as well as opportunities in engaging with counterparts. A company establishes business relationships for several different reasons. They may act as devices to increase efficiency by developing activity links between its internal structure and that of the counterpart. Relationships may also facilitate innovation mechanism through the combination of a company's existing and developing resources and those of the counterpart (Ford et al., 2011). As each company is dependent by the resources of others, relationships are a company's most important asset because without them it could not gain access to others' resources. Business relationships do not always produce the same benefits, but they depend much on the involvement of the two parties and the degree to which they are prepared to adapt, learn and invest. Business relationships may also be a source of problems: they may interfere with established processes and activities; they may disrupt organizational stability and have a negative impact on a company's routines. Furthermore, relationships are costly; they may require investments, time to develop and time to adapt to the counterpart. For all these reasons, companies should evaluate carefully all technical, social and economic interdependences that may occur between the activities, resources and actors of the companies involved and within the network in which the companies operate (Perna et al., 2013). This is not an easy task and a degree of uncertainty is always left. The question remains: how do business relationships start? What persuades two potential partners to start a process of interactions with the goal of forming a future business relationship? Mandjak et al. (2015) developed a conceptual framework on this issue. Their *Relationship Emerging Flow model* contains four stages: in the starting situation the parties do not know each other, but they co-exist in proximity; in the awareness stage, a choice has to be made among potential partners and a party starts to interact with the other; in the following stage trigger issues at individual and organizational level may push the relationship to the next step. Individual trigger issues comprise personal reputation, prior relations and referral, whereas organizational trigger issues include network position, attractiveness, goodwill, visibility and the role of initiator. Social and information exchange episodes help the parties in building reciprocal trust and push learning processes both at individual and organizational level. If all the conditions are favorable, the relationship will presumably start. Trust really plays a central role in the relationship building process (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Mandjak et al. (2015)

define whole bonding trust as “a situation in which the perception of a partner’s benevolence and credibility simultaneously refers to a person and an organization”. The interaction process may come into a situation of whole bonding trust through positive perceptions of benevolence and / or credibility, both at personal and organizational level. Differently, Oliver (1990) found six contingencies that explain the reasons why organization choose to enter into relationships with one another. Each determinant is sufficient, but they may act simultaneously. Mandjak et al.’s model focuses on trigger factors, whereas Oliver’s investigates deeply the motivations behind relationships beginning, making hypothesis depending on the type of relationship (i.e. joint ventures, trade associations, federations, etc...). Both models are valid and insightful; they just start from a different perspective. According to Oliver’s framework, necessity refers to the establishment of inter-organizational linkages to satisfy legal or regulatory requirements. Asymmetry refers to the potential to exercise power or control over another organization or its resources. Reciprocity concerns the fact that two parties will engage in a relationship only if both benefit. Efficiency concerns the firm’s drive to improve its cost structure or profitability. Stability is an adaptive response to conditions of environmental uncertainty. Finally, legitimacy is the quest of consensus from internal or external stakeholders, as a response to environmental pressures. Relationships may also remain in the pre-relationship stage and never develop. Edvarsson et al. (2007) classify three categories of factors that could create relationship inertia, difficulties in cooperation processes or negative outcomes. Image is related to the external perception of a firm’s competence and service offering, thus it is based not only on direct interactions with the counterpart, but also on others’ experiences; it may contain both facts and fiction. Risk is related to the perception of the counterpart reliability, thus it is a subjective factor, consequence of a particular assessment. Bonds refers to structural or perceptual ties between the firms, which result in preference and stability in partner selection.

4. Methodology.

The method used for this research is the exploratory case study, which is suitable to “investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003). We will triangulate between different sources of data to increase case validity (Eisenhardt, 1989). The research took more than one year: we collected interviews and emails, participated at meetings and analyzed websites,

internal reports and brochures. Even if case studies may not be fully generalizable, this case is relevant because it shows a situation in constant evolution. The development path of this business relationship is made of interruptions and resumes, coherently with the IMP view on the topic.

5. Empirical setting: the case of Antrox and Nel Design.

5.1 Companies’ overview.

Antrox is an Italian company specialized in providing tailored lighting solutions. It was founded in 2004; at the moment is split in two equal shares between Luca Giraldi, in charge of management and strategy, and Massimo Rinaldi, in charge of the technical features. The company employees other four people: an engineer, a salesperson, an IT expert and an accountant. The company sells tailored lighting solutions, capable to satisfy any lighting request. Their clients are lighting experts, architects, contractors and companies involved in big projects worldwide (restaurants, hotels, spa, shopping centers...). They sell two categories of lights: cold cathode and led. The former is the technology who made the fortune of the company. It was highly customizable in shapes and colors, but required substantial technical knowledge to use it. Cold cathode is a niche market, with few companies capable of giving a professional service. Led is newer, cheaper technology. It is easier to shape, cheaper to produce and it is gradually being adopted worldwide for most uses. Antrox is internationally appreciated for its capacity to assist the client right from the beginning. They do not just sell lights, but they project and design the desired lighting experience starting from the client’s requirements. They are always available for special requests and they provide dedicated post-sale assistance. Antrox commercializes primarily abroad; in the end of 2014, 80% of the revenues came from sales in foreign countries, 67% from extra UE countries. Every year they sell approximately to 18 different countries. Revenues vary deeply from year to year as a big project can really boost revenues. 2011 was the best performing year of the company, with more than 5M Euro of revenues. During the other years revenues varied from Euro 700.000 to 2,4M Euro. Antrox relies on a wide network of distributors around the globe selling mostly cold cathode lights. The company is now trying to push Led sales out of Italy, without renouncing to their premium pre and post-sale service. Big companies offering standardized products dominate the market. For a small company like Antrox, competition in this market is possible only through a differentiating

strategy. Nel Design is an Italian company founded in 2010. It is specialized in polystyrene carving for construction and design purposes. Their products aren't simple blocks of polystyrene; they are highly resistant but very light in weight. The company can produce objects in any shape at a very small cost. Two associates run the company: Sauro Raschiatore, in charge of management and strategy, and Simone Pelizzi Narcisi, in charge of the technical aspects. The company also employs three cutting machine operators. Revenues every year vary between 200.000 and 250.000 Euro. Nel Design invested highly in technological equipment; it has a wire cutter plus a computer numeric control machine, for precision cuts. The company assists the client also in the design process. Starting from the client's input, Nel Design prepares a digital prototype and shows it to the client. If it satisfies his requirements, the prototype is sent to the machines for polystyrene cuts. After that, the shapes are coated with a special paint to increase the products' resistance. The material resulting from this process is called Porotex. The product's destination are primarily construction (outdoor decorations for buildings) and objects for interior design, but the potential application are endless. In the last years, the construction market suffered an industry crisis, whereas the interior design market is growing. The company sells exclusively in the Italian market, where it is considered one of the market leaders for the technological level of its productions.

5.2 The origins of the relationship.

Antrox and Nel Design possess distinctive and non-overlapping competences. Both companies knew that, through the combination of their skills and knowledge, they could create innovation.

Basically, they started to insert Led lights into a Porotex shell. Their business idea starts from some considerations: Led lights are easy to produce and could be inserted in any shape; there are highly efficient and cheap to produce. Porotex is also a material cheap to produce, easy to mold and extremely light in weight. Furthermore, Nel Design holds the equipment and the technical capabilities to realize any shape, without constraints. They gave the name Antrox Lab to the solution resulting from the collaboration from the two companies. Their concept aims to satisfy any clients' requirements: if an architect asks for a lamp with an extremely unconventional shape, they can produce it in a short period of time and at small cost. They are able to create innovative, cheap, resistant and unconventional lamps that stimulate the imagination of architects and lighting experts. This innovation is the result of the partnership between the two

companies. Anyway, it took years, for the two companies, to establish this business relationship.

5.3 Relationship development: key dimensions and factors

Looking back, the origin of this business relationship may be traced in an accidental event that took place in 2008. At that time Luca Giraldi from Antrox, was offering consulting services at Policolor, a small polystyrene carving company. Sauro Raschiatore, the current Nel Design associate, applied for an account manager position at Policolor. During that circumstance, they knew each other. Sauro got the job and between the two gradually started a relationship of mutual respect. Right from that time Luca and Sauro talked about a possible collaboration between the respective firms, but time was not ripe for the relationship. Daniele Traferro – who held the position of Antrox's sales manager – refused the cooperation because he was unwilling to invest in a new but ambiguous project; he was completely absorbed in its role of sales manager and he preferred to spend all his efforts trying to maintain and develop his already established relationships.

Furthermore, Antrox's revenues were increasing with several simultaneous cold cathode orders around the globe. Similarly, Policolor's management, in spite of Sauro's advice, preferred not to take the risk of investing in a new, not well-defined project. The seed was sown, but it was not time for the start of a business relationship. Nevertheless, the relationship started at interpersonal level, between Sauro and Luca.

In 2010, Sauro Raschiatore left Policolor, to form Nel Design with a pool of other people. During the years spent at Policolor, he acquired substantial knowledge of the sector and he was now ready to accept new challenges, this time not as employee but as owner.

In 2012, after a couple of years of adjustments, he tried to reconnect with Luca Giraldi. Nel Design was into a project with a contractor to realize furniture turnkey solutions. Sauro asked Antrox to join the project for the lighting part. This time Luca refused the collaboration, as he was skeptical about the contractor's reliability.

Nevertheless, in September 2014, the business relationship started. Sauro contacted again Luca, asking to put in practice the idea of inserting led lights into a Porotex shell. Now both companies were facing a different situation. Antrox was suffering the cold cathode decline and the tough competition in the led market. Conversely, Nel Design was suffering the construction sector crisis and they needed to invest more in the interior design market.

Furthermore, Daniele Traferro left the company few months before, so now Luca had no one within the company dissenting his business idea.

They soon started creating prototypes in order to transfer a technology (Porotex) from one application (outdoor decorations) to another (lamps). In few months several activities were performed; the technicians of both companies started to cooperate in order to design unconventional shapes in order to raise the interest of architects. They presented their Antrox Lab creations to lighting experts to have their feedback (See an example in Picture A).

Picture A. Antrox Lab Pendant Lamp. Source: Antrox Lab catalogue.

They found a new coat supplier to increase the product resistance. They participated at fairs and trade shows. Both companies started sending e-mails and brochures to their contacts, presenting their innovation. In addition, the website was re-designed. Finally, in January 2015, they had their first sale to FalaCittàdella Luce, a furniture and lighting contractor.

During the first half of 2015, the employees of the two companies reduced cultural and social distances. Working together on product design, adapting to the client's requests and mutually overcoming technical problems, new knowledge emerged from the combination of different pools of resources and trust arose both at personal and organizational level. After almost a year of meetings and conjoint experiences, a high degree of confidence between the members of both companies was established and relational attractiveness is now set not only at interpersonal level, but also between the two organizations.

Nevertheless, Antrox Lab lamps' sales are below expectations as architects have a skeptical attitude towards Porotex, still considering it as a fragile and low value material for lamps. Antrox and Nel Design do not want to put aside their partnership, as they still believe in the great potentialities of their product. On the contrary, they are thinking to extend their collaboration to other market segments.

6. Discussion.

In our case, the start of the business relationship has not been a linear process. The path towards the start of this collaboration has been irregular and full of interruptions. It took six years to put in practice the original business idea of inserting led lights into a Porotex shell. Applying Mandjak et al. (2015) model to our case study we find that both individual and organizational trigger issues played an important role in the relationship formation. For what concerns individual trigger issues, the fact that

there was a prior relation between Luca and Sauro is crucial.

This is also coherent with Dibben and Harris (2001: 13): *"the importance of personal relationships goes beyond the mere maintenance of transactions; they may be the bedrock upon which economic transactions are founded"*. Indeed, there won't be any business relationship between Antrox and Nel Design, without a prior relation between Sauro and Luca. This is in contrast with the approaches that consider business relationship as starting from organizations looking for economically viable partners.

As in our case, business relationships developed from pre-existing social relationships (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995) have a propensity for enduring development and regeneration, whereas business relationships established just for need for economic exchange tend to interrupt more easily. This is to be confirmed in the long term, as the partnership is only one year old, but the fact that, despite poor market results, the companies want to renew the object of their collaboration proves the assumption. In our case, we found also organizational trigger issues; they were fundamental especially to convince the other associates of the two companies. Indeed, the high technological capabilities of Nel Design strongly attracted Antrox. At the same time, the optimal network position occupied by Antrox, in terms of worldwide connections with distributors, was an stimulating factor for Nel Design to start the relationship.

During these six years of relationship incubation, some episodes facilitated and others inhibited the business relationship formation. The fact that the companies had overlapping competences fits within the asymmetry antecedent of Oliver's model (1990); the high technological level of both companies is coherent with the reciprocity antecedent, whereas the fact that both companies were suffering from a revenue slowdown in the respective markets is coherent with the stability antecedent.

For what concerns the factors that inhibited the start of the business relationship, the risk inhibitor of Edvardsson's et al. model (2007) applies to our case as in 2008, when Policolor associates refused to hazard investments in the project. In the same occasion, the bonds inhibitor took place, when Daniele Traferro chose to dedicate all the company's resources for the maintenance of already established relationships. Finally, in 2012, the image inhibitor prevented Luca to start the relationship, as he had a negative perception of the partners involved in the contracting project. This case study shows how the development of a new business is nonlinear and onerous. Indeed

the companies had to adapt, through intense interactions, to the counterpart's resources as each one was using different software packages and different ways to approach the product's design. As the employees of the two companies began the process of interaction, individual and organizational trust arose, as inter-personal trust positively affects inter-organizational trust (Ashnai et al. 2015). The parties could not predict when the time was ripe for the start of the relationship, as each company constantly experiences several technical, social and economic interdependences within its network.

Only through intensive interaction between the actors, it has been possible to overcome reciprocal obstacles to the relationship formation.

The collaboration between Antrox and Nel Design was born to produce lighting systems in Porotex. However, given the poor market results, it will probably evolve in other directions, trying to compete in other market segments. As described by Ciabuschi et al. (2012: 228): "how a new venture will develop is difficult to foresee given the collective nature of new business formation". Furthermore, each company is embedded in time and space in a network of other relationships; it is hard to plan the development of a business relationship without considering social, technological and economical interconnection taking place through the network.

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Is a picture worth a thousand scales? Visual self-report tools for analysing brand perceptions' insights.

Abstract:

Within an experiential marketing context, brands try to elicit strong emotions and affective feelings from their customers. Because they are hidden and intimate, understanding and capturing such consumer responses is very challenging for research analysts. There are many different methodologies, ranging from very qualitative (collages) to very quantitative ones (like Likert scales). Depending on the dimensions of the emotions we would like to study, cognitive, behavioral or physiological, some autonomic or self-reported instruments are available. The goal of our study is to assess different self-reported approaches that can be used to identify and measure consumers' emotional reactions towards brands they like. More specifically, we want to compare some traditional closed Likert scales, to some more illustrated and spontaneous instruments using pictures or collages. The goal is to determine whether visual and spontaneous protocols are able to generate deeper insights than only closed groups of scales. The instruments are evaluated on some responses' quality criteria and on their ability to produce deep and accurate insights. Visual hybrid protocols seem to produce promising outcomes.

Keywords: collage; mixed methods; visual methods; brand attachment; emotions.

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Introduction

Within a general context in which experiential aspects of consumption are considered as crucial (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), various strong feelings can be observed in a consumer-brand relationship. Consumers can have a passion to the brand or hate it. Love is one of those strong feelings that marketers try to create between their brands and consumers (Albert et al, 2008). Once customers turn into brand lovers, it will be hard for competitors to attract those loyal ones. They may also become the ambassadors of the brand and try sometimes to “evangelize” around them. Then, emotional and experiential consumer insights are getting more important and crucial for marketing decision-makers (Ng and Hort, 2015), especially in some areas or sectors in which those aspects are really central, like brand strategy, but also tourism, culture, entertainment or retailing for example. But clearly, consumers’ brand-related emotions are difficult to capture (Derbaix and Poncin, 2005; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005). Within the typology of affective reactions (Derbaix and Pham, 1991), we consider brand-related “emotions” and “feelings”, since the stimulus is specific (the brand) and the somatic intensity is moderate to strong. For emotions, the duration is brief while for feelings it is moderate to long.

The aim of this study is then to evaluate some different instruments to capture brand-related consumer emotional insights, designed under different approaches. There is a growing trend of promoting the joint adoption of both verbal and nonverbal approaches for better assessing emotional responses and providing additional or deeper insights regarding associations made by consumers about brands in large scale. Within a global context of a rising “image culture” (Jansson, 2002), we wanted to consider more illustrated and spontaneous instruments using pictures or collages, and test them within an international environment.

1. How to capture strong brand-relationship expressions? An overview of the measurement methods.

There are commonly three components of emotions: cognitive, behavioral and physiological (Gil, 2009). Our research is focused on the understanding of the cognitive dimensions. Methods of assessing emotions can be generally divided according to the components of the emotional response as follows (1) affective self-reports, including verbal self-report, visual self-report (Bradley and Lang, 1994), and moment-to-moment rating (Poels and Dewitte, 2006), (2) physiological

measurements (e.g. skin conductance, pupillary responses, pulse rate), and (3) behavioral changes (e.g. facial action coding system, e.g. Ekman, Friesen and Ancoli, 1980; Kaiser and Wehrle, 2001; Förster, 2014; Kim, Cho and Kim, 2015). Physiological and behavioral measurements are difficult to use for a larger sample and in a brand context. Firstly, physiological measurements allow detecting the occurrence of even mild emotions, but they do not uncover which specific emotion is attached to the brand. Secondly, the measurement of behavioural changes, e.g. by using facial action coding systems, does not consider marketing specific emotions yet. Those autonomic measurements are well-adapted to advertisement testing for example (Droulers and Lajante, 2015) when the stimulus is precise and temporized. But brand-related emotions elicit more durable emotional states and they probably need a more qualitative assessment, not only intensity or valence. Thus, the methodology of self-reports is probably the most appropriate way to measure brand related affective reactions. They gauge subjective feelings requiring respondents to report them, with the use of a set of rating scales or verbal protocols (Förster, 2014).

Parallel to that, researchers need to consider some new “mixed” protocols (Spanjaard, Young and Freeman, 2014) to combine the interests of both qualitative techniques (spontaneity and depth of analysis), and quantitative techniques (volume and objectification). There is a clear and recent growing trend of interest for mixed methods in the social sciences (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010), to bridge the traditional gap between extreme positivist or interpretativist approaches. More specifically, it is envisaged to develop some electronic versions of traditional qualitative visual methods (like collages for ex.), to update them (Koller and Sinitsa, 2009) and take advantage of the power of dissemination of the Internet. The theory of “dual-coding” presupposes the primacy of images to capture the most emotional nonverbal reactions (Paivio, 1971). The use of pictures as means of expression for emotional reactions is considered as less biased than verbal instruments (Derbaix and Filser, 2011) and that was recently discussed and validated by a research by Yoon, Desmet and Pohlmeier (2013). In the field of design studies, they used pictures to facilitate “emotional granularity”, for a finer and deeper expression of emotional reactions. Some recent research projects have started to investigate the efficiency of such protocols like the “on-line wall of pictures” (Ganassali, 2016) or the “quali-quant synaesthesia” (Pawle and Delfaud, 2014) for example. The general concept is on one hand to keep the basic advantages of classic qualitative

techniques like depth and subtlety of analysis and to increase the number of observations, on the other hand especially thanks to some multimedia Web protocols. That would result in a more significant number of responses, which allows the researcher to analyse and discuss the observed outcomes on a more objective basis.

2. Objectives and methodology of the study

We aim at comparing some traditional closed scales in which a list of items is proposed and evaluated through Likert measurements, to some more illustrated and spontaneous instruments using pictures or collages. We want to determine whether visual and spontaneous protocols are able to generate better and deeper insights than groups of verbal scales only.

Criteria to assess the quality of responses. Accordingly to the possible consequences of satisficing responding behaviours (Krosnick, 2000), we consider the response and completion rates (Ganassali, 2008). We also are interested in the evaluation of the instrument by the respondent, in their capacities of favouring the respondent's ability and motivation and to reduce the task difficulty. Then, we can get a double assessment of satisficing behaviours and the related quality of responses: a declarative one via the final evaluative questions and a factual one through the actual response behaviours. Additionally, the "evocative richness" measures the volume of relevant emotional contents formulated by the respondents in their verbatim. For example, via a systematic content analysis, it is possible (see Mossholder et al. 1995) to quantify the number of experiential or emotional insights included in the textual responses to the open-ended questions of the survey.

Methodology: visual against scales protocols. We have designed three versions of the same consumer survey dedicated to identifying some brand-related consumer emotional insights. The three protocols share the same introductory stage - in which they are asked to say what their favourite brand currently is - and the same final section dedicated to the evaluation of the survey (ability, motivation and task difficulty) and some socio-demographics. We have developed three self-report instruments. The first protocol is simply based on the emotional attachment scale developed by Thomson et al. (2005). It is made of ten items evaluated through a Likert-scale. It can be defined as "assisted declarative". The second is "assisted associative": it consists on an online "wall of pictures" elaborated according the principles defined by Ganassali (2016). The respondents are

asked to choose three pictures to describe - in that case - their feelings towards their favourite brand. In the next screen, the three pictures are presented to them again, and they have to explain why did they choose them and what do they represent to them. It was proved that those kinds of mixed protocols were promising to stimulate the abundance and diversity of responses, in consumer behaviour studies. The third scenario is "spontaneous associative" and, like a collage, the consumers may choose the pictures they want to express their feelings. It is called the "on-line collage", and starts from the results of some first experiments ("Album on Line" for example - Vernet 2007) combining the advantages of several existing techniques. In the AOL process, participants extract keywords from stories associated with the studied experience, and select images on the Web. A collective album is subsequently made by a moderator or by a process of collective selection. In the on-line collage protocol, respondents are requested to search pictures on the Web and upload them into the survey questionnaire, as an individual expression of their emotions towards any relationship with a brand or consumer experience.

The three tested protocols. The following figures illustrate the three protocols and the way they are concretely presented to the survey target respondents

| | |
|--|--|
| Protocol 1 - Emotional attachment scale (assisted declarative) | |
|--|--|

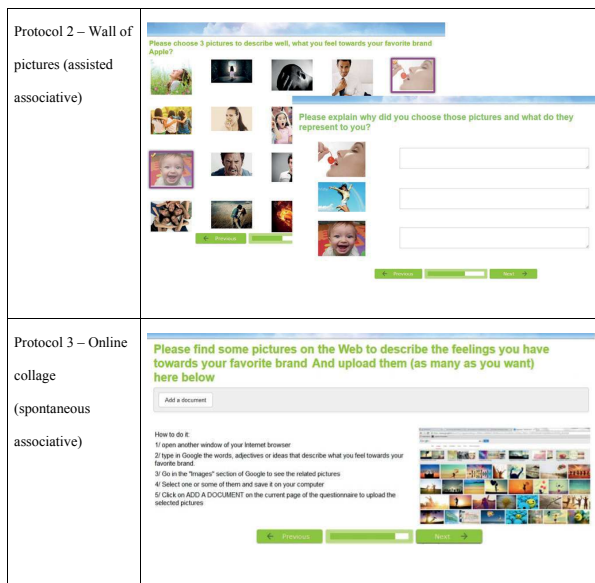


Figure 1: Screenshots of the three different tested protocols

Sample. For that methodological piece of research, we used a convenience sample. In November 2015, the surveys were first circulated through two groups of Bachelor and Master students in two countries: France and Poland. They were also distributed to a panel of company managers in France to get a bigger variety of profiles in terms of generations. The three versions of the survey were randomly assigned to any target contact. In total, we got 532 responses. The average age of the respondents is 31 years. 60% of the sample is composed of female respondents and the level of education is quite high (on average, between 3 and 4 years of higher education).

3. Results and conclusions.

We start introducing the results with behavioural and factual measurements and then look at the evaluation of the respondents. Finally, we consider the very challenging evocative richness of the protocols.

Dropouts, time and completion rates. As we can see from the table below, the dropout rates are similar for protocols 1 and 2 (between 5 and 6%) and it is higher for protocol 3, which reaches almost 20%. The completion times for the three different protocols are difficult to compare because the tasks are quite different. It is naturally much longer to browse the Web and upload some significant pictures: the survey with the 3rd protocol takes almost 10 minutes on average. The two first protocols result in a shorter survey: almost six minutes for the wall of pictures and five minutes for the first protocol proposing scales.

For the completion rate, we are interested

in the proportion of missing values, in the various situations, considering that only the very first question related to the favourite brand is programmed as mandatory and cannot be skipped. The highest completion rate is obtained for the wall of pictures protocol: more than 91% of the respondents completed the full task by choosing two pictures and justifying their choices with some free texts. 87% of the participants completed all the ten scales for protocol 1. Finally, only 82% of the respondents uploaded one or several picture(s) for protocol 3 and justified their choices with some free texts. On average, they would upload 2,5 pictures.

| | Dropout rate | Average completion time (excl. 5% lower and higher) | Protocol completion rate | (*) Significantly different from P1 and P2 at $p < 0,05$ (**) Significantly different from P2 at $p < 0,05$ (Exact Fisher tests) |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---|--------------------------|--|
| P1 (emotional attachment scale) | 5,7% | 4 mn 58 sec | 87,2% | |
| P2 (wall of pictures) | 5,4% | 5 mn 48 sec | 91,4% | |
| P3 (online collage) | 19,8% (*) | 9 mn 25 sec | 82,3% (**) | |

Table 1: Dropout, completion rates and completion time for the three tested protocols

Ability, motivation and task difficulty. Since the likelihood to satisfice is linked to respondent ability, respondent motivation and task difficulty (Krosnick, 2000), we also compare the perception of the respondents on those dimensions for the three different protocols. In the end of the survey they were asked to assess the questionnaire with eight related questions and a wall of pictures. As we can read from the table below, protocol 1 (the emotional attachment scale) is considered as easy and quick but not very interesting and enjoyable. In addition to that, its score for expressiveness is low. Protocol 2 (the wall of pictures) is well evaluated: quite easy and quick, exciting, enjoyable and helpful to express feelings. Protocol 3 (the online collage) is rated higher for feelings expressiveness and lower for quickness and easiness.

| | P1 (emotional attachment scale) | P2 (wall of pictures) | P3 (online collage) | Sign. diff. at $p < 0,05$ (t test) |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| It is well-designed | 3,71 | 3,99 | 3,76 | None |
| It helped me to express my feelings | 2,76 | 3,27 | 3,35 | $P1 \neq P2$ and $P1 \neq P3$ |
| It motivated me to answer | 3,31 | 3,71 | 3,18 | $P1 \neq P2$ and $P2 \neq P3$ |
| It was easy to use | 4,89 | 4,97 | 3,72 | $P1 \neq P3$ and $P2 \neq P3$ |
| It was easy to answer | 4,55 | 4,65 | 3,73 | $P1 \neq P3$ and $P2 \neq P3$ |
| It was interesting | 3,49 | 3,81 | 3,78 | None |
| I enjoyed it | 3,55 | 3,92 | 3,73 | $P1 \neq P2$ |
| It was quick | 5,19 | 5,20 | 4,09 | $P1 \neq P3$ and $P2 \neq P3$ |

Table2: Respondents' evaluations for the three tested protocols

Evocative richness. Comparing the evocative richness of such different protocols is a real challenge. Since the richness is also probably related to the nature of the favourite brands, we decided to compare the insights produced by the three protocols mainly for the two most frequently chosen brands, being Apple and Ikea.

First protocol (emotional attachment scale). 10% of the evaluations state that the proposed items describe poorly the emotions. That figure raises to 24% if we take the precedent grade (just before “describes poorly”). From a traditional Likert-scales protocol, we can clearly compare the level of emotions elicited by the two brands. Generally, Apple is emotionally higher than Ikea. For that first brand, the level of connection is specifically strong (5,58 out of 7). However, the Swedish brand is considered as more friendly and peaceful than Apple.

| | Apple | Ikea |
|--------------|-------|------|
| Affectionate | 4.05 | 2.94 |
| Friendly | 2.65 | 3.63 |
| Loved | 2.70 | 2.00 |
| Peaceful | 2.82 | 4.41 |
| Passionate | 3.91 | 2.35 |
| Delighted | 4.67 | 3.71 |
| Captivated | 4.83 | 4.00 |
| Connected | 5.58 | 3.94 |
| Bonded | 4.36 | 3.75 |
| Attached | 4.86 | 4.50 |

What is the extent to which the following words describe your feelings toward your favourite brand?

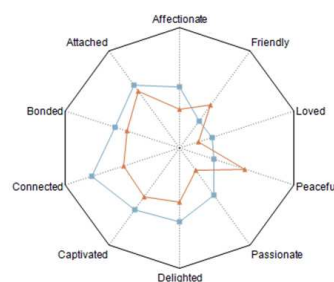


Figure 3: Emotional differences between Apple and Ikea captured by protocol 1
Second protocol (wall of pictures).

As an outcome of the analyses performed within the wall of pictures protocol (Ganassali, 2016), brands, selected pictures and textual justifications can be represented together on a factorial map, so that associations may appear. In our example, it is quite clear that Apple is associated with emotions like surprise or impressiveness, sharing, but also relaxation. In those results, Ikea relates to conviviality, joy, happiness and friendship. The other plotted elements on the factorial map may help to possibly identify the major dimensions differentiating brand-related emotional responses in our study: sophistication/distance on the left versus ordinariness/familiarity on the right of the horizontal axis; collective pleasure on the bottom versus individual care on the top of the vertical axis.

Third protocol (online collage with uploaded pictures).



Figure 5: Pictures uploaded to express feelings towards Apple (back) and Ikea (front).

Based on around twenty respondents per brand, we can analyse the uploaded pictures for the two brands in a systematic way. Three topics are coded by a procedure of content analysis (Bell, 2004): colours, genders and leading emotions of course. We can clearly see that evocations are quite different for the two brands. Apple is black and white (and a little grey too) while Ikea is whiter and more multicolour. Ikea is more feminine. As far as emotions and feelings are concerned, our coding shows that the associations for the two brands are: efficiency, polyvalence and touch for Apple, with some aspects of innovation, simplicity and aesthetics too; profusion of colours and aesthetics mainly for Ikea, with some minor dimensions of sharing, creativity/inspiration, joy and comfort.

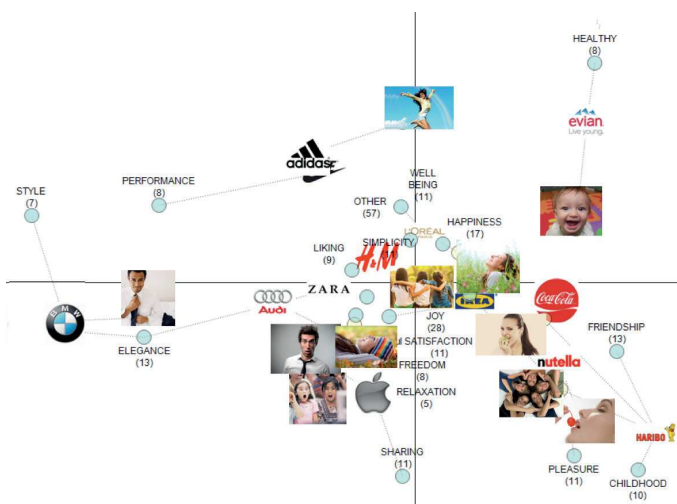


Figure 4 – Emotions captured by protocol 2: correspondence analysis

| | Apple | Ikea |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Colours (n>3) | White (18) and Black (17); Grey (9); Blue (6); Red (5); Yellow (4) | White (21); Multicolour (10); Grey (10); Blue (10); Brown (10); Black (4) |
| Gender (n>3) | Male (8); Female (6) | Female (9) |
| Dominant emotions or feelings (n>2) | Efficiency/reliability (8); Touch (5) Polyvalence (4); Innovation (3); Simplicity (3); Aesthetics/design (3) | Multicolour (10); Aesthetics/design (9); Profusion (7); Sharing (6); Creativity/inspiration (6); Joy (5); Comfort (4) |

Table 3 – Some content analysis' outcomes of the uploaded pictures

Conclusions

It is not surprising to see that the three protocols provide researchers with different levels of quality and different types of insights. Regarding the depth of the insights, the Likert scales are very standardised and therefore easy to analyse for comparing consumers' perceptions about some different brands. However, the quality of the insights is strongly related to the accuracy of the tool for capturing the studied phenomenon. In the case of emotions, it seems quite challenging to find the right instrument able to capture a wide variety of emotions. In our example, the emotional attachment scale (Thomson et al., 2005) first manages to show that one brand is globally higher than another one in terms of global emotional intensity. It specifies the dimensions on which the "competing" brands are better: connection for Apple, friendliness and peacefulness for Ikea in our case. Anyway, it's quite difficult to be sure that some important brand emotions are not missing because they could not be properly captured by that standardised instrument. Like all positivist tools (Mukherji and Albon, 2014), that sort of scales possibly lacks in accuracy and may produce superficial information. Especially for emotions, it is admitted (Paivio, 1971) that their verbalization is not always easy or possible. Our respondents rate that scale protocol quite low in terms of expressiveness. In addition to that, 40% of the consumers are picking only three points or less within the whole set of seven modalities. In the lists of scale questions, the respondents sometimes tend only to choose a very narrow range of responses from all the possibilities. This behaviour pattern is called "non-differentiation": respondents satisfice, show a lack of interest and a weak level of effort for answering (Ray and Muller 2004).

This is mainly why visual protocols may be specifically promising: they are considered generally as useful for "capturing deep contextual

meanings of consumer experience" (Rohani, Aung and Rohani, 2014). We have tested two of them and they clearly seem to provide researchers with deeper insights, a better emotional granularity (Yoon, Desmet and Pohlmeier, 2013), so to speak. The respondents clearly rate those visual instruments as more interesting, enjoyable and expressive. The online-collage - as a very spontaneous instrument - provides researchers with more specific emotional responses. For example, the multicolour feeling associated to Ikea cannot be easily elicited through pre-defined scales of emotional attributes. However, as shown in our experiment, that protocol may increase significantly the number of dropouts, because it may be perceived sometimes as difficult and demanding, even if in the end, 20% is not that high for such a task. If we look at the respondents' evaluations, the wall of pictures seems to be a good compromise between convenience and expressiveness. Looking at the insights we got from the responses, they are more specific as the Likert scales dimensions, but clearly less rich than the ones obtained by the online collage. But the quality of data and the respondents' assessment (see tables 1 and 2) is higher.

More than promoting one protocol instead of another, we may learn from our experiment that those different emotions self-report measurements are adapted to some diverse research situations. Likert scales are useful for very confirmatory or comparative analyses, when researchers are clear about the nature of the emotions they want to assess. In that case, they may resort to the related instruments like the ones specifically developed for brand love (Albert et al., 2008) or brand trust (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003) for example. For a more exploratory approach, the on-line collage may be well adapted. In fact, as a spontaneous, open and projective protocol, disseminated in large scale through the Web, that instrument is probably able to identify more precisely the various dimensions of the emotional relationship between consumers and their favourite brands. The combination of visual and textual responses provide researchers with a wide set of complementary information, which they naturally have to interpret and recode cautiously. The same applies for the online wall of pictures. Since the respondent is proposed a selection of 20 to 30 pictures, that instrument is less open than the collage. But the textual justifications (second stage of the protocol) may also elicit some more specific and precise emotional states.

As future research, we could try to identify whether there are some specific profiles of consumers who are more sensitive or reactive to on-line visual protocols than others, like young

people, or technophiles for example. Maybe there could be some cultural differences as well, in the way we use pictures and words to express our feelings, and this could be investigated in the future, within a bigger intercultural study.

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Mee too ... Consumer mimicry. How far are we?

e too..." Consumer mimicry: how far are we?

Abstract: Examined under a multitude of approaches, the chameleon effect remains a central concept in personal interactions and seems to affect consumer behaviour. However, although highly dealt with, it seems many stones still remain unturned. This article proposes to enrich the reflection at three levels: at the cognitive level, these will be the factors determining mimetic behaviours; at the normative level, emphasis will be laid on their impact on consumers' purchasing behaviour and at the operational level, the consequences for the company / brand will be highlighted.

Our study is based on a triangulation of observation, experimentation and semi-directive interview techniques. The results reveal a multitude of mimetic behaviours that depend on the set objective and profile of the mime.

Key words: mimicry –imitation - chameleon effect - consumer behaviour – interpersonal influence.

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Introduction

While companies continue to invest in the implementation of a multitude of strategies in a bid to manipulate consumer behaviour in a way that is favourable to them, it is nevertheless obvious that decisions to buy and consume products depend largely on the members of their reference groups, opinion leaders and other people who consciously or unconsciously influence their choices (Bansal & Voyer, 2001; Wooten, 2004). Indeed, consumer decision-making depends on both marketing stimuli and interpersonal influence. However, the interpersonal influence that is at the root of mimicry behaviours can take two forms: one of informational type and the other of normative type. In the first case, the consumer will try to imitate a person whom he / she considers better informed (Deutsh & Géraard, 1955; Orléan, 1992) or competent in the matter in order to reduce his / her uncertainty (Hockbaum, 1954) and be sure of making a good choice (Moscovici & Faucheux, 1972; Festinger, 1954). In the second case, the consumer will imitate either by identification in order to value himself (Ash, 1951), or by simple complacency (Kelman, 1961) or to avoid any punishment incidental thereto (Akerlof, 1990).

Initially studied by Bates in 1862, the mimetic phenomena discussed under the concepts of mimicry, imitation, chameleon effect, assimilation, adaptation, homochromy ... drew the attention of researchers in biology, economics, anthropology, sociology, social psychology, law, political sciences and management sciences. This last aspect generated work in entrepreneurship, finance and marketing. Research on mimetic behaviour in marketing focuses on both the supply approach and the demand approach. With regard to supply, it is all about the 'Me too' strategies or imitation strategies of companies that decide to copy their competitors. Whereas, as concerns demand, it is question, for consumers to imitate a consumption or buying behaviour of a person.

However, despite these many researches, mimetic phenomena remain complex and poorly known phenomena. While the related taxonomy, its terms, patterns and profiles of the various actors were developed, we do not always have clear knowledge of its actual effects on the product / brand concerned, or even on the variability of its effects. This article aims to shed light on factors that determine mimetic behaviours and their types, as well as their impact on the consumer's behaviour. To conclude this work, we suggest future research avenues for a better understanding of the phenomenon studied.

I- Mimicry, an old sheep so much solicited

The concept of mimicry for which several disciplines showed interest since the eighteenth century, has long been examined under a multitude of approaches. Initially developed in biology (Bates, 1892, Emlen, 1968), it was studied in social psychology (Festinger 1956, Moscovici 2006, Hess & Fisher 2013), anthropology (Jousse, 1936; Girard, 1972; Meltzoff & Moore, 2005; Dias 2005), from a sociological perspective (Tarde, 2001, Durkheim, 2002) and, to a lesser extent, ethologically (Cendrars, 1948). It was also addressed from a psychoanalytical perspective (Freud, 1986, Oughourlian, 2013), psychologically (Ash, 1951, Kelman, 1958), by economic trends (Orléan, 1987; Ruf, 2012; Keynes, 2002), in the application of legal texts (Calmette, 2002, Bolle, 2009) and in the political domain (Gaudusson, 2009; Nogbou, 2015). This rich construct also served as a framework for decision-making in entrepreneurship (Knight, 1971, Dubocage, 2006), fiscal choices (Parot, 1989, Pupon & Montant, 2004), financial markets (Orléans, 1992, Bikhchandani & Sharma, 2000) and in marketing (Levit, 1966; Haunschild & Miner, 1997; Grève, 1998; Schnaars, 1994; Mouricou, 2006; Van Baaren, 2003; Lyn, 2005; Tanner & Al., 2008; Maddux & Al., 2008; Jacob & Guéguen, 2011).

I-1. Theoretical approaches to mimicry

Research on mimetic phenomena can be grouped into three schools of thought: the classical approach, the traditional approach and the managerial approach.

I-1.1. Classical approach to mimicry

This school includes biological and ethological approaches. The major works here are centred around four axes:

- The animal and plant mimicry (Bates, 1862; Emlen, 1968; Cendrars, 1948)
- The mimicry actors (Cendrars, 1948; Ricklefs, 2010)
- The categories of mimicry (Bates, 1862; Müller, 1978; Emlen, 1968)
- The mimetic strategies (Bates, 1862).

I-1.2. Traditional approach to mimicry / imitation

Studies relating to this line of thought deal with psychology, social psychology, sociology, psychoanalysis, anthropology and economics. The reflections here focus on five points:

- The reasons why people imitate (Ash, 1951; Festinger, 1956; Hochbaum, 1954; Chartrand & Bagh, 1999; Guéguen, 2005)
- The mechanisms for the imitation of one's

environment (Jousse, 1936)

- The dimensions and types of mimicry (Meltzoff & Moore, 1998 ; Keynes, 2002)
- The functions and attributes of mimicry (Sperber, 1996 ; Boyd & Richerson, 2000)
- The effects of mimicry (Cialdini, 2004 ; Bhabha, 1984 ; Philipps, 1968 ; Oughourlain, 2013)
- The mimetic behaviours (Girard, 1972; Guégen, 2005; Van Baaren & Al., 2003; Chang & Al., 2000).

I-1.3. Managerial approach to mimicry

This school is inspired by the traditional movement and is based on three ideas:

- The taxonomy of mimetic phenomena (Deutsch & Gérard, 1955 ; Orléan, 1992, 2000 ; Haunschild & Miner, 1997 ; Hess & Fisher, 2013)
- The role of mimicry on the functioning of markets (Orléan, 1992 ; Bikhchandani & Sharma, 2000)
- The importance of mimicry in decision-making (Ruf, 2012 ; Dubocage, 2006 ; Gaudusson, 2009 ; Maricou, 2006)

Our research falls within the managerial approach to mimicry, integrating in the analysis the studies made by the traditional approach and considering mimicry as an important element in consumers' decision-making processes. In fact, the mimetic process will induce in the *mime* (imitator) the decision to purchase or consume a product / brand out of identification, self-development, and complacency or just to avoid any punishment. It therefore implies an interpersonal influence likely to have effects both on the *model* (person imitated) and the *mime*.

By acting on the consumers' behaviour, mimetic behaviours have a negative impact on the company's key success factors, especially the image of the brand in question, its reputation, the sales volume, the market share and its profitability.

The managerial approach to mimicry could be broken down into several sub-approaches of which the marketing approach would be a component. This aspect of mimicry which is of particular interest to us in our research can be dealt with from the supply and demand perspective.

I-2. Mimicry and marketing: from inter-organisational mimicry to interpersonal mimicry

The marketing approach to mimicry can be subdivided into two lines of thought:

- The inter-organisational approach to mimicry

- The interpersonal approach to mimicry

I-2.1. Inter-organisational mimicry

Inter-organisational mimicry consists in copying part or all of a strategy, skill or technique from another organisation in order to achieve commercial success. It plays an important role in the diffusion of innovations and can be considered as a strategic approach to reduce research and development costs or reduce risks associated with the innovation (Levitt, 1966; Schnaars, 1994). At this juncture, we will elaborate on the forms of imitation and the reasons why companies imitate their model (s).

With regard to forms of imitation, Haunschild and Miner (1997) proposed a taxonomy based on three configurations:

- Imitation based on frequency
- Imitation based on results
- Imitation based on the characteristics of the model

Imitation based on frequency consists in copying the most wide-spread practices. This form of imitation builds on the neo-institutionalist approach to mimicry (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which makes mimicry one of the mechanisms explaining the similarities of organisations. Indeed, according to this approach, companies imitate the most identifiable, most widespread and seemingly legitimate behaviours. Therefore, the decision is not that of an isolated organisation, but that of a collective functioning as an organisational field (Pupion & Montant, 2004).

Imitation based on results, on its part, consists in copying practices that appear to have performed well in the past.

Imitation based on the characteristics of the model, finally, in copying practices adopted by performing and / or large firms. Benchmarking strategies result from this approach.

As for the reasons why companies emulate others, beyond the reduction of risk and the integration of practices and procedures institutionalised by company, organisational mimicry responds to a triple logic according to Moricou (2006):

- An utilitarian logic
- A conventional logic
- A referential logic

In the case of *utilitarian logic*, the objective of the *mime* (the organisation that emulates) is to enjoy the spin-off benefits of a procedure, a technique or a practice of its model (the one which is being emulated).

In *conventional logic* you imitate because you want to repeat a solution that

is widely adopted around you in order to offset against uncertainty.

Finally, in *referential logic* you imitate one or many models in order to increase your legitimacy, to strengthen your social identity.

1-2.2. Interpersonal mimicry

Described as *chameleon effect*, the interpersonal mimicry is a tendency for a person to mimic the other (Chartrand&Bargh, 1999). "*It consists in replicating, in one form or another, the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of our interlocutor in the process of social interaction.*" (Jacob, Guéguen&Boulbry 2011: p. 6).

Mimicry, in the case of verbal content, may take the form of replication or reformulation. In the first case, it is a question of mimicking the tone and / or tone of the voice of the model - interlocutor (Van Baaren&Alii, 2003) while in the second case it is a question of reproducing what our interlocutor said in a new verbal construction. Although there is no major empirical research on this scenario, the use of these techniques could be cited in the case of commercial training (Messinger, 2007; Goldstein, Martin & Cialdini, 2008; Underhill, 2009). The phenomena of spreading of rumours and word-of-mouth are also an illustration of verbal mimicry. On the other hand, in the case of non-verbal content, mimicry will consist in a reproduction of the gestures, the way of doing things, the way of dressing, eating ... of the other person.

We can distinguish several types of non-verbal mimicry:

- *Informational mimicry* ; here we mimic the other / others because we assume that he/she is or they are better informed (Orléans, 1992) or more competent than us (Hochbaum, 1954)
- *Normative mimicry* ; in this case the mime seeks to adopt the behaviour of his/her model in order to join the group (Ash, 1951 ; Allen & Wilder, 1977) or to avoid sanctions may be taken against him/her for non-conformity to the group (Akerloff, 1990)
- *Self-referential mimicry*; here the mime follows the majority even if their behaviour does not fit with his/her schema of reference (Keynes, 1936).

The decision to mimic someone can be taken and executed immediately or in a deferred manner. In addition, one can mimic a model in extenso (*Pure mimicry*) or copy only certain aspects (*Adapted mimicry*)

and therefore make a mix of several styles.

The latter type of mimicry takes the form of hybridization (Brodin&Al., 2016).

Mimicry may reveal points of convergence or divergence with imitation, a related concept. Thus, for Dieguez (2005), these two concepts are synonymous because they represent the reproduction of a behaviour or a perceived attitude in others such as gestures, appearance, dressing, consumption, etc. While for Baudonnière (1997), these two concepts are different; according to this author, the behavioural mimicry is very present in animals and sometimes in humans: it is unconscious whereas imitation is essentially a human characteristic: it is a voluntary act. Imitation is therefore characterized by selectivity, self-consciousness and consciousness of others.

Several researches were developed within the framework of inter-personal mimicry in marketing and were focused on two main axes: the functions of mimicry and the consequences of mimicry.

Thus, mimicry can be perceived as a means of acquiring status within a social group (Bikhchandani&Sharma, 2000, Guéguen&Al, 2009), a learning process (Bandura, 1977 ; Cuillier, 2008), A factor of estimation of others (Chartrand&Bargh, 1999 ; Bailenson&Yeen, 2005 ; Van Baaren& Al., 2004) and as an innate competence, a means of cultural transmission (Sperber, 1996 ;).

Mimicry as a means of acquiring status in a social group: the theory of the desire to create affiliation

We imitate the behaviours of our model (s) because we want to get in touch with him / her, because we want to join their group or because we appreciate them and want to resemble them. Indeed, one of the reasons that motivate the consumer to use the same products / brands or to have the same consumption habits as a model lies in the desire to belong to his/her group that he/she deems good for him/her. By this mimetic behaviour, the mime creates an affiliation with his/her model: this is a rational bayesian behaviour because it takes into account the behaviour (s) of others. We can therefore, in chorus with Ash (1951) and Allen & Wilden (1977) refer to this mimicry as normative because the mime adopts the same consumption behaviours as the model (s) in order to join the group. He/she acts out of conformity by consuming what the group consumes for fear of reprisals if any (Akerloff, 1990). In this perspective, the imitation would

be automatic and indispensable or constant (Jacob, 2011) for anyone wishing to be part of the group and thus acquire the status of 'social glue' (Lakin & al., 2003).

In the same vein, Lakin & Chartrand (2003) showed that informing participants that they would meet in a few minutes a person who was presented on video would increase the level of imitation of certain behaviours of that person.

Mimicry as a learning process

Mimicry has an important place in the learning process: it is through mimicry that one learns to dress, to smoke, to consume, to use certain products. Indeed, one often observes a joint mimicry in the sound accentuations of the two interlocutors during a conversation either in speech flow (Webb, 1972) or in accents (Cappela & Panalp, 1981). This unconscious mimicry which leads the mime to learn the way of the other is also observed in the case of laughter; when a person laughs, his entourage laughs more (Cialdini, 2004).

Mimicry does not only affect verbal expressions, but also behaviour. This is the case with the behaviour of smokers: by mimicry, the neophyte inquires about the style of inhalation, how to hold the cigarette, puff out the smoke, and douse it (Harakey & Alii, 2007). There is also a strong synchrony in the way consumers drink in bars (Quigley & Collus, 1999).

Here, the learning process is like a process of seeking information, seeking experience from the superior by the inferior, from the competent to the incompetent. Indeed, it is a mimicry of an informational nature whereby the consumer will copy the purchasing / consumption behaviours of his / her model (s) because he / she assumes that his / her model (s) is / are better informed than he / she (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955, Orléan, 1992)

Mimicry as a factor of estimation of others

Impersonating someone affects the judgement you may pass on him/her (Baileson & Yee, 2005) and the submissive behaviour towards him / her (Van Baaren & Alii, 2004). Indeed, the mimicry of the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of our interlocutor is coupled with a positive / more positive evaluation of the person who mimics us and a reinforcement of his / her influence. It seems that we better appreciate an interlocutor who imitates us and that the latter proves more persuasive. Similarly, Van Baaren & Al. (2004) showed that an experimenter who imitated the non-verbal

behaviour of a subject during an interaction and who, a few minutes later, accidentally dropped pieces on the ground is more helped than if she did not imitate the non-verbal behaviour of a subject. This positive effect of mimicry on judgement is observed even when the imitator is not a human being.

Mimicry as an innate and cultural transmission competence

Mimicry is an innate competence of the human species because it is a social learning mechanism that is transmitted from generation to generation through traits and behaviours. Meltzoff and Moore (2005) demonstrated that infants are able to mimic human actions and that *deferred imitation* can occur in the first months after birth or even in the first weeks.

1-3.Explanatory factors and consequences of mimicry

The works we have just presented show that mimetic behaviour in marketing plays a decisive role in decision-making processes at both company and consumer level. By influencing and guiding consumer choices, mimicry inevitably affects the company's key success factors.

1-3.1. Explanatory factors of mimetic behaviours

Several variables explain the consumer's tendency to mimic others; it can be out of the desire to belong to a group, conformity to cultural norms and even his / her socio-demographic profile.

- Desire to belong to a socially distant group

The consumption choices of several people are nothing but a way of imitating a socially distant group. By purchasing a product / brand, we try to show that we belong to a given group; hence confirming the assertion 'tell me what you consume I'll tell you who you are'. Several studies have shown that among which the works of Baudrillard (1968), Cocanougher & Bruce (1971) and Belk (1980).

- Conformity to cultural norms / group norms

Culture is recognized in marketing as a predictor of consumer behaviour. Thus, we very often imitate the lifestyle, the consumption habits of our parents or those of the environment in which we grew up. This influence encourages the consumer to identify himself or herself with his 'brothers' to the point where he/she is sometimes obliged to modify his/her own behaviour in order to match it with that of the group, even if the latter does not seem rational or logical. Ash (1973) develops the concept of normative imitation to

demonstrate the importance of conformity to group norms in social interactions. The work of Moscovici (1980, 1985) also fully agree with that by integrating in the analysis the concepts of majority and minority. Indeed, according to this author, the individual will modify his / her behaviour if the majority of the members of the group do it. The consumer can also imitate the consumption behaviour of group members to avoid possible sanctions (Cialdini& Goldstein, 2004); For that, he / she necessarily goes through the compliance process (obedience). He / she can finally imitate for self-development sake, to improve his / her self-esteem.

- Socio-demographic profile of the main actors

Mimetic behaviours also depend on the socio-demographic profiles of the mime and the model (one does not mimic just anybody and no one imitates just anybody. In fact, mimetic behaviours seem to depend on gender, generation, level of education, socio-professional category and income, Thus, women tend to imitate more than men ; Generation Y, the least educated and the poorest.

Once the factors determining the mimetic behaviours are known, it is worth analysing the consequences on the attitudes and behaviours of mimes as well as on the company.

I-3.2. Consequences of mimicry

Through the process of interpersonal influence, mimicry acts on the consumption behaviour of the mime both at the cognitive, affective and conative level. This will inevitably affect the company's key success factors. The table below summarizes the possible effects of mimicry on the consumers and the company.

Table 1: Effects of mimicry on the consumer's behaviour

| Dimensions | Effects on the consumer | Effects on the company |
|------------------|--|--|
| <i>Cognitive</i> | Knowledge of product / brand Product / brand test | Improvement of product / brand awareness |
| <i>Affective</i> | Favourable attitude vis-à-vis the product / brand Product / brand preference Development of an unfavourable attitude towards the brand not recommended | Improvement of the corporate image Deterioration of the image in case of avoidance of a given brand |
| <i>Conative</i> | Product / brand test Fidelity / Commitment vis-à-vis the brand Favourable word-of-mouth De-commitment and unfavourable word-of-mouth, if applicable | Increase in sales volume Decrease in sales, if applicable |

After developing the conceptual framework of our research, we will present the

methodological approach adopted at the level of empirical investigations.

II -Exploratory analysis of the mimetic behaviours of consumers

The works developed in the foregoing have shown that the concept of mimicry is a cross-cutting concept and it is used as a learning process and factor of innovation. From the consumer's perspective, it constitutes an element of culture diffusion, affiliation, integration into a group and improvement of the self-image. It thus makes it possible to better understand the mechanisms to crave for something.

The particular mimicry that we want to highlight is that of the consumption of cosmetics, especially hairstyles. We chose this field of analysis because we think that the phenomena of mimicry are very developed there.

II-1. Study methodology

Inspired by the triangular approach, this study combines both techniques and multiple targets in order to better understand the studied phenomenon and guarantee the reliability of results.

II-1.1. Analysis plan

The aim of this research is to have a clearer vision of the mimetic behaviours through the factors that determine them and their consequences on the company. In this perspective, the combination of several techniques using the triangulation method is essential in order to collect as much information as possible and to enhance the reliability and validation of the proposals (Abric, 1994). Thus, a first phase of observation allowed us to criss-cross and contact some of the most popular hairdressing salons in the cities of Douala and Yaounde and to select two young women volunteers for the experimentation. Then we selected four salons (two in Douala and two in Yaoundé) in which we conducted an experiment in order to understand the main element that determines the choice of a style and the evaluation of their model. Finally, semi-directive interviews were conducted with forty-two people including thirty-two women with nice hairdo. Ten other people were interviewed, including one for informational purposes: nine hairdressers and a hairdressing teacher. This mixed sampling strategy improves the reliability of the results (Brodin& Al., 2016, Miles &Huberman, 1994).

II-1.2. The experimental process

The experimentation was conducted over eight weekends and we chose the weekend because it is the peak period during which the women come to do their hair. To highlight mimetic

behaviours, we selected two young women with very nice hairdo (they had their hair done the day before by the hairdresser of the chosen salon) and who had to go and spend hours in a hairdressing salon. One was playing the role of a client and the other was supposed to be an aesthetician who came to visit the hairdresser. The objective was to see if the clients who would come that day had the tendency to imitate. We accompanied them in turn to the four selected hairdressing salons and in which did installed cameras to observe the behaviours and ensure a better transcription. At the end of the experiment, thirty-two clients who came to get themselves spruced up were questioned on three aspects:

- what inspired the choice of their hairstyle
- their appraisal of the two models of hairstyle used for experiment
- their intention to get done for themselves the hairstyle (s) of the two ladies (for those who did not imitate that day).

II-2. The results of the study

Our results will be presented in two sections: the results of semi-directive interviews with hairdressers and the results of the experiment in hairdressing salons.

II-2.1. Contribution of the exploratory qualitative study with hairdressers

Our ambition during this exploratory phase was to verify whether mimetic behaviours were noticed by hairdressers in their clients' decision to choose a hairstyle. For this, an interview guide was worked out with twelve hairdressers in Douala and Yaoundé. This guide focused on three themes:

- The experience of hairdresser in the trade
- The mental representations of hairdressing styles and models
- The main criterion for choosing a hairstyle

It appears from these interviews with hairdressers (whose experience ranges between seven and fifteen years) that most selected hair models are imitated. In fact, according to our respondents, the choice of hairdressing models by clients largely depend on others. Thus, very often their hairstyles are just:

- The reproduction of that / those of another client met in the salon, in town, or elsewhere ;
- The copying of the model of a friend, a sister, a colleague or any other acquaintance
- The imitation of the model of a lady / a well-known figure

We also observe fashion phenomena and

in rare cases styles that are specific to certain clients. *"There are women who are trying to propose specific models, inspired by a known style or a model of a known person or star. She therefore says that she wants to resemble her without copying at 100%"* (Suzanne, 46 years old, hairdresser).

The mental representations of hairdressing

The analysis of hairdressers' views reveals that the cognitive representations the woman has of hairdressing can be of several types: a transformation of a dream into reality, a sign of freedom and personality, an expression of beauty and a springboard for individuation. For hairdressers themselves, it is to enhance their skills, to develop.

- Hairdo as transformation of a dream into reality

Hairdressing has a transformative power whose ultimate aim is to look like a person socially distant from the mime. *"Girls come here to do their hair so as to look like stars, thanks to the dexterity of my fingers, they now have the face they often dreamed of"* (Queen, 38 years old, hairdresser).

- From personality to well-being

For some women, there is a link between hairdressing style / model and personality. For others, hairdressing gives a feeling of well-being. *"Generally, quiffs and some buns are reserved for ladies while long transplants and multi-coloured braids are the stuff of 'yoyettes' (young girls). Anyway, each feels comfortable in her style"* (Michou, 29 years old, hairdresser).

- Hairdressing, an expression of freedom

Each hair model and the extension / hair colour has a symbolic meaning for the wearer. Indeed, through her style and her colours, the hairdressing is a sign of freedom. *"When these girls decide to put three to four colours considered extravagant by the society, it is to say that they are free to do what they want. When they do that during certain events like the African Cup of Nations, with Green Red Yellow extensions, they express their pride to be Cameroonians and you read cheerfulness on their faces. Multi-coloured hairstyles are therefore a preserve of women who love freedom ..."* (Solange, 46 years old, hairdresser)

- The expression of beauty at the centre of motivations

The hairstyle is primarily an expression of the beauty of the face. This highlighting of aesthetics is a way to showcase your beauty around you. *"That hairdressing model will enable a woman with an oval face to bring out the beauty that cannot be seen with different hairdo. In short, with a quiff, she will look nice of course; but with that bun, you will see all aspects of the beauty of her face. Thus, I*

recommend this hairstyle to all women who have the same facial features as this one" (Victorine, 32 years old, hairdresser).

- Hairdressing, a springboard for differentiation

The hairstyle is also a way to stand out from the others, a sign of ostentation. "You see the hairstyle I wear? This is one of my creations: it is unique because it blends together many styles. It differs from others by this inverted fring and this zig-zag split. When I move round, all eyes are on me and I have already got many customers thanks to this hairdo; many women come to have the same and as a matter of fact, I wonder if I should remove it" (Pascaline, 37 years old, hairdresser).

II-2.2. The results of the experimental study

The results of our study were obtained based on video recordings in hairdressing salons and views of women who got their hair done. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed and were the subject of a thematic analysis revealing the thrust developed in the statements of the interviewees, its various aspects, the frequency of each sub-theme, the glossary and verbatim.

➤ From informational mimicry to differed mimicry

The analysis of the statements of the interviewees reveals several types of mimicry that depend on the set objective of the mime and moment of his reaction. Thus, five forms of mimicry were observed, namely:

- Informational mimicry
- Normative mimicry
- Self-referential mimicry
- Immediate mimicry
- Differed mimicry
- Pure mimicry
- Adapted mimicry

The first three forms of mimicry reveal why we imitate others and the last two types specify when the subject is mimed. The table below presents a summary of the statements of the thirty-two women we interviewed.

Table 2: Taxonomy of mimics

| Sub-themes | Frequencies | Glossary | Verbatim |
|--------------------------|-------------|--|---|
| Mimicry informational | N= 8 | Competence Experience Talented | "I have done the same hairstyle she did because she has experience in that kind of thing" "She is better placed than me, and that's why I prefer to do it her way" |
| Mimicry normative | N= 30 | Transmission of culture Conformism Desire to belong to the group | "In our country, braids are an expression of the African beauty" "I always loved my aunt's hairstyle; and today I do my hair like her" |
| Self-referential mimicry | N= 10 | Fashion Majority | "This is the hairstyle all the girls of my age do now. So, I am fashionable" |
| Immediate mimicry | N= 7 | Differentiation straight away | "When I entered the salon, this lady's hairstyle struck me and I decided to do the same" "Ah! My hairdresser's hairstyle is sublime. Why not do same and feel great..." |
| Mimicry differed | N= 15 | Replica in future | "This is the hairdo of an actress from the series 'la Patrona'; she is very beautiful" "Next time, I will wear the same hairstyle as the friend of my hairdresser" |
| Pure mimicry | N= 28 | Full copy Duplication | "This is exactly the same hairdo that Grace Decca now has" "I have the same model as my girlfriend" |
| Adapted mimicry | N= 2 | Partial copy | "I drew inspiration from a model I saw in Amina Magazine and I got a fring added to it" "I certainly built on a cousin's model, but I added my personal touch to distinguish myself" |

These results show that women mimic others because they have more experience, because they want to look like them, because they want to join a group, because they want to confirm their belonging to the group and because they want to distinguish themselves.

➤ The determining factors of mimetic behaviours

As we have just underscored, several reasons can prompt us to mimic others. The analysis of the statements made by the mimes that we interviewed during our study shows results that are presented in the following table.

Table 3 : Determining factors of mimetic behaviours

| Topic | Sub-themes | Frequency | Glossary | Verbatim |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|--|
| Mimetic behaviours | Search for experience | N= 2 | Ignorance | "I prefer to steal from others because I do not know anything about hair models" |
| | | N=6 | Learning | "It allowed me to know a new hairstyle" |
| | Pleasure | N=9 | Cheerfulness | "I'm glad to wear the same hairstyle as the First Lady" |
| | | N=12 | Well-being | "With this model, I feel at ease..." |
| | Differentiation | N=18 | Attention | "Since I got this hairdo, everyone looks at me when I pass" |
| | | N=7 | Visibility | "More than usual, people look at me" |
| | | | Individualisation | "This hairstyle makes me conspicuous among all the girls in my class" |
| | Desire to belong to the group | N=5 | Integration | "This hairdo is the sign that I am still young" |
| | | N=4 | Conformism | "This is not a hairstyle for a lady" |
| | | N=21 | Improvement of one's image | "With such a model, I am admired" |
| | Fear of not being considered | N= 2 | Marginalisation | "It doesn't look good..." |
| | | N= 3 | Lack of esteem | "Imagine a Muslim with a quiff on the head" |

We also have observed that the herd behaviour depend on a combination of factors which might be added the socio-demographic profile. And the imitation of a hair of a personality is both a pleasure, a way to improve its image, to distinguish themselves from other women in her peer group and inquire of a new model.

Once the various types of mimicry and the reasons why the mimes to do the same as other known, it is therefore important to know what the stakeholder profiles.

➤ *The profiles of mimicry actors*

The analysis of the speech obtained shows that the person you mime can be someone we know or someone you do not know or even someone that can be seen on a television screen, newspaper, on the internet etc. For known people, it is members of reference groups, opinion leaders, personalities and movie stars. These models belong to all generations, are generally educated or more educated and have relatively high incomes. For cons, the mimes are people little or not known in their reference groups, social class lower than that of the model and not at all or moderately educated. The following table summarizes the information that we collected in the field.

Table 4 : Sources of inspiration of mimes / models profiles

| Themes | Sub-themes | Frequencies | Glossary | Verbatim |
|--------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Models | Known persons | N=28 | Family members; friends; colleagues | "I took this hairdo after my mother" "My colleague got this hairstyle; I enjoyed it and I decided to get the same" |
| | | N=7 | Personality | "This is the preferred hairstyle of Michele and as she is my idol..." |
| | | N=17 | Star | "This is Ryana's hairstyle" |
| | Unknown persons | N=12 | Random encounters | "I copied it from the lady sitting there" |
| | | N=14 | Star | "I saw it with an actress in a movie that my daughter was watching" |
| | | N=6 | Advertising figures | "I got this model from Amina Magazine" |

These results reveal, finally, that we can appreciate something or someone without forcibly mimic. Indeed, among the 32 people we interviewed who were exposed to two hairstyles identified, 28 found them very beautiful; 10 imitated immediately and 12 promised to do so later on. 6 people did not express their opinion on the decision to have one of these two hairstyles.

II-.3. Limitations of the study and future research paths

The exploratory nature of this research gives it limitations that prevent the generalisation of results and opens several paths for future research.

II.3.1. The limitations of the study

This research has two main limitations due to its context and the sample size, raising the question of its external and internal validity. The completion of this study in a specific context (in two cities in Cameroon) decreases its external validity. Indeed, the external validity implies that the results of a study are identical from one environment to another; which refers to the ability to produce generalizable results and therefore to the possibility to replicate the results in other African countries or other continents. In addition, the exploratory nature of this study led to the use of a small sample; which always makes it difficult to generalize the results.

II.3.2. Paths for future research

The results presented above lead us to believe that mimicry remains a field of research as rich as it's young, allowing us to envisage several avenues of research. Among the multitude of possible ways the following two seem important:

- works allowing to make a comparative analysis of mimetic behaviour from one environment to another: the generalization of results to better understand whether individuals located in different areas and belonging to different races have similar mimetic behaviours.
- works using a quantitative approach, so as to conduct a study on a larger sample and check links that can provide a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to identify that determine mimetic behaviours and highlight the types of mimicry, as well as their impact on the consumer's behaviour and the company. This research has two inputs both theoretical and methodological: the theoretical contribution is based on a cognitive approach by proposing a taxonomy of mimetic behaviours based on the purpose, content and horizon. The second contribution, methodological, relies on a combination of data collection approaches and study targets. Indeed, we used observation (non-participating and participating), interview guides and experiments to collect data from professionals, users and third parties.

The exploratory study enabled us to demonstrate the impact of mimicry on the decision making process of the consumer. There is evidence of immediate and deferred mimicry of informative, normative and self-referential kind. It has also been found that the mimicked object can be copied entirely or not. These results also indicate that

mimetic behaviour depend on the objective and the socio-demographic profile of the various actors.

However, this research still poses a problem of validity both externally and internally because of the context of the study (conducted in two cities in Cameroon) and the sample size that make it impossible to generalize the results. Hence the need for more studies in different settings to see if the explanatory factors are the same, and to identify the variability of behaviours. It also seems relevant to complement this research with a quantitative study on a larger sample in order to highlight the links between certain predictors of mimetic behaviour and solve the problem of its internal validity.

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