The influence of Social Media on consumers during their purchase decision-making process and the implications for marketers.
Declaration

I declare that the work described in this dissertation is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as any type of exercise for a degree at this or any other college/university.

Signed: _________________________________

[Charles-Henri Gros]

[September 13th, 2012]
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Abstract

Over the past decade a new form of media has arisen which due to its social features seem to have a great power of influence on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process. Today, more and more consumers use Social Media to communicate together but also to communicate with brands. This new interaction is of interests for marketing professionals.

The study aims to explain how the influence of Social Media is reflected on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process and if this influence differs at the various stages of this process.

A questionnaire (quantitative data) and two semi-structured interviews (qualitative data) were the data collection instruments used for this research.

The study finds that the influence of Social Media differs according to the various stages of the consumers’ purchasing decision making-process. Thereby, the more the consumer progresses through the stages the more the influence of Social Media is diminished. Other findings explain that cultural background such as nationalities makes Social Media influence more or less strong according to the different stages of the consumers’ purchasing decision-making process. The study also highlights implications for Marketers that have the opportunities to seize the power of influence of Social Media.

To conclude, these findings indicate directions for futures researches to investigate the impact of characteristics, such as cultural background, demographics features and differences in usage, on the influence of Social Media that might affect consumers’ purchasing decision-making process.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Media influence, Consumer’s purchasing decision-making process, behaviour, implications for marketers.
1. Introduction

1.1 Background – The Changing Face of Marketing

The recent emergence of Social Media has drastically changed the marketing landscape. For Parker (2011, p201), the time of traditional marketing, where marketers were pushing out messages toward consumers using only a one-way communication, is over. Nowadays, as said Brown and Hayes (2008, p165) ‘ads don’t work anymore in the real world because there are too many of them, and because they interrupt us inappropriately’. In contrast with traditional media, Social Media have greatly changed relationships between consumers and companies by allowing a two-way communication (Hoyer, and MacInnis, 2010, p389). A new marketing function called ‘Social Media Marketing’ has arisen.

Cavazza (2010) said that Social Media Marketing refers to the tools and practices used to identify and analyse conversations, to participate and initiate social interactions within communities and thus consumers. In contrast with traditional media, Social Media offer more possibilities to marketers to engage with customers and have real interactions with them.

The marketing area has thus evolved from a time where marketers had the power of influence to today where consumers have a greater power of influence on their peers (Jaffe, 2010). Indeed, Social Media enable consumers to share contents and ideas together, write recommendations, reviews and opinions about companies’ performance and to tell, to a wider audience than before, about their own good or bad experience with them (Brown, and Hayes, 2008, p179-180). Consumers have access to a wide range of different Social Media types, platforms and tools, with different characteristics and possibilities that allow them to be connected and communicate together. Sago (2010, p7) stated that Social Media have significantly impacted how information is shared among groups of consumers.
Word-of-mouth plays a central role on Social Media. Word-of-mouth is well known in the marketing area and this for decades. But today, word-of-mouth appears even more important than before in the influence of consumers’ purchasing decision-making process (Brown, and Hayes, 2008, p139-146). Indeed, Social Media can carry and spread word-of-mouth between millions of users, like none of the other channels have been able to do until now. The CEO of quired.com (2009) said that we are witness today of a fundamental shift in communication because of Social Media tools. This shift has been made possible because Social Media usage has highly increased by consumers but also by marketers these last years.

1.2 Premise

1.2.1 Social Media

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube illustrate perfectly the increase of Social Media usages by consumers. At the end of 2004, Facebook counted around 1 million of users. 4 years later, in August 2008, the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, announced that the American company counted around 100 millions of users (Facebook, 2008). This seemed to be a really important increase in usage but what came next was the perfect illustration of the incredible pace of Facebook adoptions by users (see figure 1 below). Thereby, at the end of June 2012, Facebook almost reached the billion of users, counting around 955 millions of users worldwide (The Associated Press, 2012). This represented an increase of 33% over the previous year; the number of users has thus simply been multiplied by 10 in less than 8 years (United States Securities and Exchange Commission ‘Registration Statement, Facebook Inc’, 2012, p1). At the same time, Facebook announced that there were around 125 billion friend connections on their Social Network platform (United States Securities and Exchange
This proved that consumers are connected and interact together on Social Media.

Figure 1. Monthly and Daily Facebook Active Users Worldwide, United States Securities and Exchange Commission, Registration Statement, Facebook Inc (2012:1).

If Facebook showed incredible number of users worldwide, other Social Media types such as Microblogging and Multimedia sharing have also proved to be more and more used by consumers. Indeed, Twitter (2011) counted around 50 millions of tweets per day in March 2010 for 140 millions of tweets per day two years later in March 2012. Twitter is thus growing at a record pace counting 460,000 average numbers of new accounts per day in February 2011. Twitter exemplifies the increase of interactions between consumers on Social Media platforms. YouTube demonstrates the increase of Multimedia sharing usage between consumers. Thereby, 800 million unique users visited YouTube each month and the number of videos viewed every day has doubled over the past two years to reach 4 billions in May 2012 (YouTube, 2012). The interaction between consumers has been enhanced on YouTube. In 2012, the company counted 100 million of people that took a social action on YouTube.
every week and that half of the videos available on the platform have been rated or include comments from the community (YouTube, 2012).

Technological development plays an important role in this increase of usage of Social Media by consumers. Nowadays with smartphones, consumers can connect and interact together from everywhere by simply using their mobile phones. Twitter (2011) for example, counted an increase of 182 % in number of mobile users comparing with the previous years, when YouTube (2011) explained that the traffic from mobile devices tripled in 2011. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube illustrate perfectly the increase of usage of Social Media but they are also plenty of other platforms and tools that used by consumers and by companies.

Companies started to see opportunities to exploit from the raise in Social Media usage by consumers (see figure 2 below). Burson-Marsteller (2012) examined the use of Social Media by the Fortune Global 100 and found out that 87% of these companies were using at least one Social Media Platform. This represented an increase of 10% over the two previous years.

Figure 2. Percent of Fortune Global 100 Social Media Usage, Burson-Marsteller (2012).
According to the same study, the average number of followers on companies’ Twitter accounts and Facebook pages has drastically increased these two last years (see figure 3 below). More and more marketers are now using Social Media to engage with consumers.

![Figure 3. Increase of Fortune Global 100 Social Media Usage, Burson-Marsteller (2012).](image)

### 1.2.2 Consumer Behaviour

In consumption, consumers pass through different stages that put together form the consumer’s purchasing decision-making process (Belch and Belch, 2003, p107-122). Specific stages are involved in this process. Hoyer and MacInnis (2010, p12) recognized five stages that are ‘Need Recognition’, ‘Information Search’, ‘Evaluation of Alternatives’, ‘Decision Making’ and ‘Postpurchase Evaluation’. In their purchasing decision-making process, consumers are often influenced by both internal and external influences (Belch and Belch, 2003, p112-114).
1.2.3 Online Social Media & Consumer Behaviour

The raise of Social Media usage by both consumers and companies seem to affect consumer behaviour.

Also, Social Media influence the way consumers behave during the different stages of their purchase decision-making processes. Wheat and Dodd (2009, p3) quoted Carson, the president of Online International Nielsen, ‘the explosion in Consumer Generated Media over the last couple of years means consumers' reliance on word-of-mouth in the decision-making process, either from people they know or online consumers they don't, has increased significantly.’

Social Media has changed the way consumers behave in their consumption. When before consumers were waiting for companies to push messages toward them, they are now directly seeking for information on Social Media. Consumers can recognize new needs on Social Media when ‘surfing’ on some social networks such as Facebook where they can see friends displaying pictures of products they bought or using the ‘like’ button to mention brands that they like for example. The Need Recognition stage seems thus to be influence by Social Media.

Today, online communities have more and more influence on consumers’ purchasing decision-making. Parker (2011, p263) stated that ‘when people are in the research or “education” phase of the buying cycle, they have access to a wider audience of current past, or prospective customers worldwide that they can consult before making their decision’. With Social Media, digitally empowered shoppers have access to a wide range of new tools to find and research products and they now consult with peers and experts (Wheat and Dodd, 2009, p4). These possibilities offered by Social Media seem to be influential at the Information Search stage of the consumer decision-making process.
With the emergence of Social Media, consumers have changed their approach of consuming. They are now comparing products and services thanks to tools and websites such as review and opinions platforms that allow them these comparisons. They can read reviews and ratings about products, services and companies performance, that are shared by their peers that had good but also bad consuming experiences. Forums for example allow interactions where they can seek opinions and ask questions to more people than before. Social Media appear to be influential on the consumers at their Evaluation of Alternatives stage.

In addition to this interaction with peers they can also use Social Media to interact directly with brands. Indeed, consumers can get more information about products and services by directly engaging with brands on Social Media.

Social Media brought new challenges for marketers that have to change the way they interact and communicate with consumers. They cannot only push messages like they used to do in the past since consumers are no longer listening these kinds of messages. Indeed, because consumers are now overwhelmed by marketing messages they tend to filter them out (Brown, and Hayes, (2008, p165). Moreover, the fact that, consumers tend to trust more peers than corporate brought new implications and push marketers to change the way they communicate and interact with them (Jaffe, 2010, p185).

Social Media seem thus to play an influential role at the 5 different stages of the consumer’s decision-making process presented above. However the exact role of Social Media at the different stages of the process seems to be still unclear.
1.3 Research Question and Objectives

If decades of research (Bourne, 1957; Howard and Sheth, 1968; Park and Lessig, 1977; Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Foxall, 2005) have always proved that peers influence consumers during their purchase decision-making process, we have found that there is an important lack of research explaining what is the exact role played by Social Media at the different stages of consumers’ purchasing decision-making process.

The research is thus guided by one central research question that is ‘How does the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process differs according the different stages?’

Moreover, the influence of Social Media on consumer’s purchasing decision-making process has brought new implications for marketers that it would be interesting to research.

The objectives of the research are to find out what is the exact role of influence played by Social Media at the various stage of consumers’ purchasing decision-making process. The research attempts to find in Social Media influence on consumers can be impacted by different variables such as cultural backgrounds and especially nationalities. This is of interest since consumers might have predispositions to be more or less influenced by Social Media according to their cultural backgrounds.

1.4 Scope and Limitations

The dissertation is essentially focused on the role played by Social Media in influencing consumers during their purchasing decisions-making process. The dissertation will thus explore Social Media Marketing in relation with models and theories about consumers’ decision-making. However, only Social Media Marketing is considered as the scope of the
dissertation and I do not intend to research about the influence of other media and compare Social Media to the others media available in the whole Marketing area.

1.5 Dissertation Structure

In order to best conduct the research, the dissertation structure will be as follow. Chapter two will examine the literature review on the area we are interested with. This part will be articulated around definitions of main concepts to have a strong background of the subject; the different consumers’ purchasing decision-making models and theories existing, the influence of Social Media on the consumers’ decision-making process and the implications arising for marketers.

Chapter 3 will discuss the research methodology that has been employed to best answer the research question during the dissertation. This chapter will present the research philosophies, approaches, strategies, choices and time horizons that have been used. Thereby, this chapter will discuss about the research methods, concerning data collection and analysis, which will be used to test the theory and answer the research question. This chapter will be concluded by a discussion about the ethical issues, the limitations to the research, and the time allocation that has been decided for writing the dissertation. Chapter 4 will present and illustrate the findings of the research. In chapter 5 I will discuss the findings and the Chapter 6 will present the conclusions of the research. The final chapter will be dedicated to a self-reflection on my own learning and performance though the dissertation writing.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The marketing landscape has drastically changed in the last decade. Before, companies and their customers had no direct link to each other’s respective worlds (Jaffe, 2010, p160). The emergence of Social Media has changed the way consumers interact together but also with companies. Consumers, through their growing use of Social Media and by using word-of-mouth, have now a powerful and even greater influence on peers. Social Media platforms and tools allow users to share contents, recommend products and tell about their positive and negative consumers experience with companies (Brown, and Hayes, (2008, p179-180).

Fotis, et, al (2012, p1) reminded that De Valck, et al (2009) suggested that ‘the virtual communities are becoming important networks of consumers knowledge that influence consumer behaviour’. Moreover, Wertime and Fenwick (2008, p31-51) added that ‘consumers are more likely to be participating than watching’ stating that these last years we have been witness of a shift in the consumer behaviour from being ‘consumers as viewers’ to ‘consumers as participants’. This new behaviour is reflected by their increasing use of Social Media to become a participant. Consumers’ purchasing decision-making process appears thus to be influenced by Social Media in its different stages.

To understand and grasp the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchase decision-making process, I will, in a first part, define the main concepts coming from the literature. In a second part I will set forth the diverse consumers’ purchasing decision making models and theories that exist in the literature; in a third part I will present the different types of Social Media available to consumers and I will discuss the influent roles that they play in the stages of consumers’ purchase decision-making process. The fourth part will be devoted to present the gap between consumers and marketers and the last part will
present the main implications for marketers arising from the use of Social Media by consumers during their purchasing decision-making process.

2.2 Definition of main concepts

Strauss and Frost (2011, p328) defined social media as ‘a term used to describe the type of media that is based on conversation and interaction between people online’. The main difference with traditional media is that, on social media the content is not generated as a corporate monologue, but it is seen as a conversation where participants can upload content, discuss, edit but also rate each other’s content (Strauss, J. and Frost, R. 2011, p328).

For Solis (2011, p9) social media is not a one-way broadcast channel but is rather considered by Hoyer, and MacInnis (2010, p389) as a two-way communication where information from a personal source seems more vivid than information from the mass media. This is due to the fact that a person speaking makes it more real and is more persuasive towards the audience. What retains our interest is that Social Media has a role to play in a business context. Parker (2011, pXVIII) defined Social Media as ‘ways to spread the world about your brand or product on the Web using tools and websites that allow a conversation to take place between you and your target market’.

Hoyer, and MacInnis (2010, p12) explained that ‘the process of making consumption decisions involves four stages: problem (need) recognition, information search, decisions making, and Postpurchase evaluation (behaviour)’. As seen in figure 4 below, the second stage can be divided in two parts, ‘information search’ and ‘evaluation of alternatives’.
Brown and Hayes (2008, p6) defined influence as ‘the power to affect a person, thing or course of event’ and as ‘the action of creating an environment conductive to affecting another person’s opinion on a particular issue’.

In a business context, word-of-mouth can be defined as an extraordinary mechanism that communicates marketing messages throughout a community’ Brown, Hayes (2008, p138). Also, word-of-mouth is considered as an important vector of influence. Consumers on Social Media can be influenced by the customer experience shared by their peers. Jaffe (2010, p8) defined customer experience as the ‘sum total of all contact points, interactions, transactions, and encounters between a customer and a company, its brands, and its various product and service offerings over a determined period of time’. This influence is increased on Social Media platforms since consumers are exposed to a lot of peers’ customer experience stories. This exposition might positively or negatively influence consumers’ purchasing decision-making process.
2.3 The influence of Social Media on consumers during their decision-making process

2.3.1 Consumers’ purchasing decision-making process models and theories

Different models and theories have been exposed to explain consumer behaviour in their purchasing decision-making process. Erasmus, et, al (2001, p 83) said that these models portray the process of proceeding through a major purchase decision. Engel, et al (1968) drawn the EKB model that is today considered as the most famous consumer decision-making model. As seen on the figure 5 below, the model counts 5 steps that are the Need Recognition, the Information Search, Evaluate Alternatives, Purchase, and Outcome.

![Figure 5: Engel, Kollat and Blackwell Model (EKB).](image)

Rice (1993) suggested that there should be a feedback look at the ‘Outcome Stage’. At this stage consumers evaluate if they are satisfied or not with their purchase. This stage is considered as really important since it has direct consequence on the consumers’ future purchase patterns.
Howard and Sheth have established another consumers’ purchasing decision-making model in 1969. In contrast with the well-known 5 stages model seen above, this model counts 3 stages in which consumer go through to make their purchase decision.

At the first stage called ‘Extensive problem solving’, consumers have only little information about brands and have not yet defined criteria that will help them to choose among products and services. Moreover consumers have no experience about products/services they are looking for. At this stage consumers don’t have enough information and undertakes information search to find about the brands. At the second stage ‘Limited problem solving’ consumers have found out information and succeeded to define criteria choices but are still not decided about which brands will be suit them. At the final stage called ‘Routinized response behaviour’ consumers have strong predispositions toward the brand and are now ready to purchase a particular brand that they have chose after having enough information and made an evaluation of alternatives. As seen in figure 6 below, Howard and Sheth model has the particularity to highlight the importance of inputs to the consumers’ purchasing decision-making process and to imply how consumers will order outputs to make their final purchase decision.

![Figure 6: Howard and Sheth Model (1969).](image)
McKinsey Company (2009) created the ‘Consumer Decision Journey’ model. In this model, consumers go through different stage through their decision making journey. Here the loyalty loop is integrated in the model and will allow consumers who want to repurchase the same product to don’t go through all the stages they went through for the first purchase. As seen in figure 7 below, consumers can use the loyalty loop to go directly at the ‘moment of purchase’.

![The consumer decision journey](image)

**Figure 7**: The Consumer Decision Journey, McKinsey Company (2009).

As seen in the literature there exists different theories and models for the consumers’ purchasing decision-making model and if they present some differences, especially in the way they are drawn and presented, all of them integrate the five steps presented above: Need Recognition – Information Search – Evaluation of Alternatives – Purchase Decision and Postpurchase Behaviour.
2.3.2 The different Social Media types

There are many types of Social Media available to people to connect to each others and form communities (see figure 8 below). These Social Media types allow people to publish, share, play, build network, buy and localize. These Social Media are available on different types of devices, allowing thus people to connect from everywhere.

![Social Media Landscape 2012](image)

**Figure 8.** Social Media Landscape 2012, Cavazza (2012).
Parker (2011, pXX) broke down Social Media into 8 different categories:

- Blogging (e.g. TypePad, WordPress, Blogger…)
- Microblogging (e.g. Twitter, FriendFeed),
- Social networking (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Orkut, Plaxo, Ning, MySpace…),
- Social bookmarking (e.g. Digg, StumbleUpon, Delicious…),
- Multimedia sharing (e.g. YouTube, Flickr),
- Reviews and opinions (e.g. Epinions, TripAdvisor, eHow…),
- Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Forums

Zarrella (2010, p171-184) completed this list by adding Virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life) as Social Media types. Solis and Thomas (2011, p161) sketched a map for the Social Landscape classifying Social Media platforms and tools in a lot more categories (see figure 9 below).

This list cannot be considered as exhaustive since every year new Social Media platforms are developed allowing communities to interact together in different ways. Consumers today are well exposed to Social Media types and can be influenced in their purchase decision-making process by communities. Given that consumers have thus access to Social Media in various ways and for different uses, the influence on their consumption decision-making process can be reflected in different forms and at different degrees. It can be thus complicated to define what is the exact influence exerted by Social Media in this process.
2.3.3 The power of nonmarketing sources

Social Media has transformed the method of influence during the consumer’s decision-making process (Solis, 2010, p3). Indeed, Social Media that are considered as nonmarketing sources appear thus to the customer as being more credible due to the fact they don’t believe that these sources have personal stake in the consumer purchase consumption. This demonstrates that consumers are aware of the difference between companies that push messages toward them to make them consume products and consumers in communities that...
are similar to them and have no stake in spreading positive or negative word-of-mouth on Social Media.

According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2010, p389), nonmarketing sources are more credible and have a stronger influence on consumer decisions-making process than traditional marketing sources do. Social Media are among these nonmarketing sources and gather a lot of people who can easily, through word-of-mouth, share contents and ideas with other consumers (Jaffe, 2010, p9). Social Media platforms allow consumers to interact together and form communities. This implies that consumers on Social Media are more willing to listen to their peers, to trust them, and thus be influenced by them in their purchase decision-making process. Nielsen (2009) reported that opinions posted by consumers online were the most trusted forms of advertising. According to the study, 70 % of people trust in consumers opinions posted online (see figure 10 below).

![Have some degree of trust* in the following forms of advertising April 2009](source)

*E.g. 90 percent of respondents trusted "completely" or "somewhat" recommendations from people they know

**Figure 10.** Survey about the degree of trusts in advertising, Nielsen (2009).
2.3.4 The effect of Word-Of-Mouth

This influence can be magnified by the effect of word-of-mouth allowed by Social Media platforms and tools that give the possibility to consumers to share their good, but also bad, experiences with 'just the click of a mouse' (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2010, p408).

McKinsey&Company (2010, p2) argued that in today’s business world consumers are overwhelmed by product choices, and presented word-of-mouth as the right vector that ‘cuts through the noise in a quick and effective way’. The word-of-mouth on Social Media plays a major role in influencing consumers. Indeed, consumers tend to believe information heard from people they have a relationship with, due to the fact that people have similarity (share the same values and preferences) and feel as members of the same communities (Hoyer, MacInnis, 2010, p389). McKinsey&Company (2010, p2) described the level of trust as being higher with people that the consumer knows and the word-of-mouth as the ‘primary factor behind 20 to 50 percent of all purchasing decisions’.

This shows the power of influence of Social Media that by welcoming communities and allowing people to share contents together can influence consumers’ purchasing decision-making process. As consumers on communities tend to trust their peers because they feel like they are similar, the trust level that plays a major role in the buying process is magnified and influenced on Social Media. The increasing frequentation of reviews and opinions websites (e.g. Epinions, TripAdvisor, …) illustrates the fact that consumers are seeking for their peers’ opinions because they estimate them as being trustful.
2.3.5 The influence of Social Media at the various stages of consumers’ purchasing decision-making process

Need Recognition stage

Need recognition occurs when consumers realize that they have an unfulfilled need (Hoyer, MacInnis, 2010, p12). Needs might be triggered by internal stimuli but also by external stimuli. What is of interest here is that Social Media might trigger needs through advertisements displayed on a Facebook page for example or through a discussion with a friend that could make consumers recognize that they an unfulfilled need. The Facebook ‘Like’ button is a powerful tool to made consumers recognized a need. When consumers ‘like’ a brand page or a product/service on Facebook, all their contacts will see this ‘like’ appear on their feeds. The ‘follow’ button on Twitter acts in the same way and can thus trigger new needs for peers. Recently a new Social Media page called ‘Fancy’ combines different Social Media types that are blog and social bookmarking and is related to Facebook and Twitter pages. Fancy displays pictures of trendy products and services to its users and allows them to click on the ‘fancy’ button on the pictures of products/services they would like to buy. These pictures are then displayed on Facebook and Twitter feeds of users. Their peers can thus see what their ‘friends’ fancy and can recognize new needs.

Information Search stage

Hoyer and MacInnis (2010, p13) said that once the need recognition stage passed, consumers want to be exposed to information. Social Media offer them this information exposition since consumers can get information from their ‘friends’ but also from brands about products and services through pages they can ‘like’ on Facebook and ‘follow’ on Twitter. Belch and Belch (2003, p112-114) stated that consumers in the information search stage undertake an internal
and external search. In the external search, the authors said that consumers often consult personal sources when they seek information. This means that consumers that are seeking for information about products, services or brands can use Social Media platforms and tools to grasp or ask information to their ‘friends’.

According to McKinsey&Company (2010, p2), Social Media has a great influence on consumers especially when they are buying a product for the first time or when they are expensive because these factors tend to make consumers conducting more research and seeking for opinions. This demonstrates that Social Media can influence consumers in their information search stage because consumers can use Social Media platforms to get information about products, services and brands. Social Media give the possibility to consumers to engage dialogues with companies. However, if Social Media allow companies and consumers to have a two-way communication, it is important to note that consumers trust other consumers more so than corporate (Jaffe, 2010, p185). Social Media might give consumers the possibility to get trustful information from their peers.

**Evaluation Of Alternatives stage**

According to Jaffe (2010, p8), the communication of experience from peers has a strong influence on evaluation of alternatives stage. Arrived at this stage, consumers will make an evaluation of the different alternatives offered to them and will have to choose one in the next stage. To evaluate the different alternatives, consumers are seeking to compare products, services or brand together to make the choices that suit their needs the most. Forums appear as a good place to get valuable information and allow discussion with current of former customers. Brown and Hayes (2008, p139-146) said that messages delivered by trusted friends who tell about their own experience are highly influent. Parker (2011, p273) talked
about the notion of ‘unbiased advice’ that consumers are more likely to trust. Social Media offer consumers a wide range of reviews and opinions of tools and platforms to help them to compare alternatives.

**Purchase Decision stage**

Belch and Belch (2003, p120-122) explained that at some point in this process consumers stop searching and evaluating information to move to the next stage and make a purchase decision. At this stage, consumers will decide whether they will buy a products/services or not. This purchase decision depends partly on the motivation of consumers but also on the influence that will have the previous stage that allowed them to evaluate alternatives thanks to tools, reviews and recommendation available on Social Media.

**Postpurchase Behaviour stage**

Concerning the last stage, which is postpurchase behaviour, consumers evaluate the outcome of their purchase decision (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2010, p13). For Foxall (2005, p19-20), this stage is really important for consumers, as it will influence their future purchase patterns. In addition to influence their own future purchase patterns, they can also influence those of their peers. Indeed, consumers today use Social Media to talk about their own good or bad experiences and thus share feedback and opinions with peers (Jaffe, 2010, p 8). Social Media has increased the possibility offered to consumers to share their good or bad experiences with their peers like never before. A decade ago, consumers who wanted to talk about their own experience could only spread the world to a small circle of people around them. Nowadays
with Social Media it has become easier for consumers to spread the word really quickly to hundreds of people and influence their purchase decision-making processes.

The literature review demonstrated that the increasing influence of Social Media might play a role on the consumer’s purchasing decision-making process. However, it seems still unclear about what exact role of influence is played by Social Media and if this influence is different at the various stages of consumer’s purchasing decision-making process.

2.4 The implications for marketers

Social Media has changed the way companies do business online (Sweeney and Craig, 2011, pXV). Klaus and Maklan (2011, p772) added that the ‘Internet is transforming relationship marketing from its initial database orientation (Peppers & Rogers 1994; Payne & Frow 2005) into collaborative relationships with customers’. Social Media goes in this way and has transformed the relationship between companies and their consumers. According to Brown and Hayes (2008, p165) traditional advertisements don’t work anymore because customers are overwhelmed by them and interrupt them inappropriately so they just filter them out. Consequently, the marketer’s role has changed from a broadcaster, pushing out message towards customers, to an aggregator bringing together content, enables collaboration and builds and participates in communities (Weber, 2009, p24). Also Social Media allow companies to connect and engage customers like never before and help to enhance relationships with customers (Sweeney and Craig, 2011, pXV).
Take into account the power of word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth has taken a greater dimension on Social Media since it is now easier spread and carried on the different platforms available to customers. This raise of the power of word-of-mouth might brought a new implication to marketer. McKinsey&Company (2010, p8) stated that marketers should take this influence into account. Klaus and Maklan (2011, p 786) pointed out that managers should consider customer experience as an important strategic objective. Brown and Hayes (2008, p179-180) added that word-of-mouth through customer experience is the most influence factor that marketers have to take into account.

It is today really easy for consumers to express themselves about products, services and brands. This can be a good thing for companies that have receive positive reviews and recommendation from consumers experience on Social Media but word-of-mouth can be extremely dangerous for companies, brands, when consumers share their bad experience about them. Marketers need thus to be aware that word-of-mouth has taken on an even larger dimension because of possibilities of be spread on Social Media.

Monitor Social Media

According to Parker (2011, p263) monitoring Social Media is very important to ensure that consumers have a positive experience with the brand during their information search phase. Monitoring Social Media might help marketers to know what consumers think of their products, services, and brands and could be used as a way to adapt to consumers. Before engaging with consumers, marketers have to get involved in conversations and start to listen. Zarrella (2010, p187) stated that monitoring Social Media is an ongoing process that should be conduct by marketers.
Use Social Media to engage with consumers

Before engaging with consumers, marketers also need to identify the influencers on Social Media. According to Brown and Hayes (2008, p172), marketers need to identify specific Social Media sites that are ‘hosts for clusters of influencers’. Social Media has given more possibilities to influencers to spread messages to consumers. Once influencers and consumers are identified, marketers need to be present where customers are and engage them in a two-way dialogue (Reed, 2011, pX). This can be done by with creating content that consumers will value and pass on to peers (Reed, 2011, p17). Moreover, Sweeney and Craig (2011, p10) pointed out that consumers interacting within the Social Media broadcast their participation to their contacts and spread thus marketers’ message to a wider audience. By engaging with consumers, marketers can thus have feedbacks about the products or the brand and will be able to answer consumers (Jaffe, 2010, p154). This demonstrate that marketers can use Social Media to show to their consumers that they are actually listening and taking into consideration what they say.

PRWeek US (2011) reported that the Financial Services Roundtable used Twitter to promote its YouTube channel, which aims to show to customers how its member contributes to communities. As this example demonstrates, companies can also use Social Media to rebuild public trust, restore their images and reputations. This interaction between consumers and companies has never been as easy as today thanks to Social Media.

Use Social Media to build loyalty

Social Media provide several opportunities for marketer to enhance their existing relationships with consumers. Marketers should encourage the conversation with consumers since ‘asking for members input instils a sense of empowerment’ and make them more likely
to become loyal and use word-of-mouth to spread the word to other consumers (Parker, 2011, p137). Jaffe (2010, p101) cited a report from Forrester Research (2009) which demonstrated that there is a direct link between customer experience and loyalty; and more specifically between loyalty and willingness to repurchase, reluctance to switch to another brand and likelihood to recommend. This link means that marketers can use Social Media as a lever to make their consumers becoming more loyal.

All these advices gave to marketers to seize the opportunity offered by Social Media to influence consumers seem to be more tracks that should follow marketers. The implications, for marketers that arise from the increasing usage of Social Media by consumers seem to be still unclear.

2.5 The gap between marketers and consumers

The literature clearly demonstrated the important and increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ behaviour. However, McKinsey&Company (2011, p1) stated that digital media and online tools were still an untapped resource for companies and that only few marketers where engaging consumers through Social Media. Marketers recognize thus the importance of Social Media to influence consumer and more and more companies are today present on Social Media but only few of them are actually engaging consumers.
2.6 Conclusion

With the emergence of Social Media these last years, the traditional purchasing decision-making process of consumers has been modified. Peers that have always been a source of influence on consumers are playing today an even greater role of influence through their recommendations on Social Media. The Need Recognition stage could been modified, as the influence from peers is now easier spread.

The Information Search stage could be influenced as well by reviews and recommendations shared on Social Media. Concerning the Evaluation of Alternatives stage, unbiased advices and customer experiences may turn consumers’ choice from a brand to another. The notion of trust seems really important since consumers tend to trust more peers than companies. As discussed above, Social Media also play a role in the Purchase Decision stage considering that consumers have been able to use a wide range of comparison tools, recommendation and reviews available on Social Media that help them to make their purchase decision.

For the last stage, consumers might use Social Media to share their consumers’ experiences. This possibility of rating and reviewing products, services, and brands offered on Social Media might have a strong impact on the other consumers also present on Social Media.

The literature review showed that Social Media seem to be influential at the different stages of the consumer’s purchasing decision-making process. However, the exact role played by the influence of Social Media at the various stages of the process seems to be still unclear.

This influence of Social Media on consumer’s decision-making process brought important implications for marketers. Marketers should thus take into account the great power of word-of-mouth that allows consumers to spread the word about a company in a good but also in a bad way. Moreover, we saw that marketers should monitor Social Media in order to identify influencers and engage with consumers. Finally the literature review pointed out that
marketers should use Social Media to engage consumers to build trust. However, these seem to be more advices to consumers rather than implications arising from Social Media’s influence.
3. Research Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

Concept Mapping

I have drawn the following Concept Mapping in order to best address the research by providing a better understanding of the concept of Social Media. It was thus really important to me to have the broadest ‘picture’ of Social Media. As seen on the figure 11 below, Social Media is a broad concept that includes different types offering a wide range of different possibilities to users. So before starting the research I wanted to be sure that I had completely understood the different Social Media types and ways of use.

Figure 11: A Concept Map relating to Social Media.
The research methodology that has been used to write the dissertation was structured around the Research Onion (Saunders, et al 2007). Using the Research Onion’s approach helped me to efficiently structure the research methodology by evaluating and applying the research through the different Onion’s layers (figure 12 below). Looking at the research methodology and methods through all the different layers helped me to be sure that I have explored and answered all the different parts that were needed to best carry out the research. Moreover, using the Onion’s layers helped me to best structure the research starting from the most general to the most specific aspects.

In a first part I will present the research philosophies that I have used to articulate the research; in a second part I will discuss about the research approaches. The third part will be dedicated to the research strategies that I have considered for writing the dissertation. In a fourth part I will present the different choices of research methods that have been used and I will discuss of the time horizons that have been decided for the research project.

In a fifth part I will present the techniques and procedures that have been applied related to sampling methods, data collection, data analysis and the limitations of research that have been encountered. To conclude, I will present the time allocation that has been decided for the dissertation.
3.2 Research Philosophies

This layer of the research onion identifies the three different philosophies that can be used within the business area I am interested with (see figure 12 above). The area of research I am interested for in the dissertation is often a mixture between positivism and interpretivism. I have combined these two philosophies since it gave me more flexibility than only use one during the research.

The positivism philosophy required me to collect data and make interpretations about it. This philosophy is considered as deductive in nature and allowed me to test the theories that have been developed in the literature review through quantitative research (Saunders, et al, 2008, p113-114).

Figure 12: The Research ‘Onion’ (Saunders, et al 2007).
According to Saunders, et al, (2007, p106), conducting the research using the interpretivism philosophy ‘prompts us to the difference between humans in our role as social actors’. The marketing area and more specifically the Social Media Marketing area is relatively new, complex and unique. The interpretivism philosophy appeared thus as being more adapted to the ever-changing world of business organisations (Saunders, et al, 2008, p 115-116). The choice of this philosophy is reinforced by the fact that in order to conduct the research I needed to enter the social world of consumers and attempted to understand their world in their point of views (Saunders, et al, 2007, p116). This philosophy was well adapted to the Social Media world where I needed to understand the different degrees on influence that was different according to the people surveyed.

However, it is important to note that if the combination of two research philosophies helped to have a broader view on the research, the positivism philosophy remained the one that had more weight during the research.

3.3 Research Approaches

Saunders et al. (2007, p117) identified two types or research approaches that can be used: the deductive and inductive approaches (see figure 12 above). According to Saunders et al. (2007, p119) it is perfectly possible to combine these two research approaches within the same piece of research and suggest that it is often advantageous to do so. Since the research during the dissertation has been articulated around two main actors who are the consumers and the marketers, I thought that it would be really more interested to combine the deductive and the inductive approaches during the research.

For the deductive approach, I issued a research question that is ‘How does the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process differs
according the different stages?’. The quantitative research was designed to test the theory about the Social Media’s field and to analyse the outcomes of the research. Comparing to the deductive approach, the inductive approach is more concerned with the context of events that tends to evolve at an incredible pace in our area of study. This is the case with Social Media Marketing that is a developing area that has quickly evolved these last years and continues to develop more every year. This is this ‘context of events’ that pushed me to conduct a qualitative research in order to develop a theory from the findings.

3.4 Research Strategies

Saunders et al. (2007, p135) identified several research strategies that can be used: experiments, surveys, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research (see figure 12 above). For the purpose of the dissertation, I have used the survey as appropriate research strategies to answer the research question (figure 13 below).

The survey strategy is related to the deductive approach used in the research approach. Followed this strategy appeared as being well appropriate to the research area and helped to collect a large amount of data in a highly economical way (Saunders, et, al, 2007, p138). Moreover, using surveys helped me to reach a lot of respondents, collect and analyse a large amount of data from a sizeable population for free thanks to the thus of Internet tools and platforms. Saunders, et, al (2006, p138) explained that these data are standardized and allow thus easy comparison. Having standardized data was important for the research in order to confront answers and thus draw valuable findings from comparison. Surveys are usually considered as easy to understand for respondents since they are well guided and used to answer surveys. Moreover, using surveys was the best way to collect a large amount of answers.
To best answer the research question two types of questionnaires have been combined. I have first designed a self-administered questionnaire that has been administered through the Internet by using Social media platforms and tools; and then I have used in an Interviewer-administered questionnaire. The second questionnaire was designed as a semi-structured interviews. The self-administered questionnaire gave me the large amount of quantitative data that was necessary to get valuable findings and answer the research question. I have seen an opportunity to use Social Media to share the survey since I believed that, through their use of Social Media platforms, the respondents that are also consumers, were already familiar with the area of research and the ‘technical’ terms used in the questions. However, as discussed above in the research approaches part, I also needed to collect qualitative data. These data have been collected thanks to the semi-structured interviews. These interviews allowed to go more in depth in the answers of respondents and helped me to know what implications arose from the answers of the first questionnaire. These semi-structured interviews were very valuable to address the implications for marketers related to the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchase decision-making process. These interviews that were administered to marketers provided me with ‘on the field’ valuable answers. The marketers’ answers were really useful since they allowed me to confront the theory with the reality on the field.

Combining these two types of questionnaire appeared thus to me as being the best method to collect the data necessary to draw theories from the findings.
3.5 Research Choices

Saunders et al. (2007, p145) have indicated that the researcher has the choice between three different research methods that are the mono method, the mixed methods and the multi-methods (figure 14 below). To conduct the research, I have decided to use the mixed-methods (see figure 12 above). For the purpose of data gathering, questionnaires have been administered through two manners: self-administered and interviewer-administered. As said above, the self-administered questionnaire was administered through the Internet. The link to the questionnaire has been posted on different social media where I have asked people to answer but also to share it with their own networks. Consequently, using this technique of administration allowed me to gather a large amount of information, in a short span of time and in an economical way. The second way of administration of the questionnaire was through a semi-structured interview with two specialists of Social Media Marketing in order to gather qualitative data.
According to Saunders et al. (2008, p151), quoting Curran and Blackburn (2001), the choice of mixed-methods is increasingly advocated within the area of research for the dissertation. Indeed, the authors said that this method is the most adapted for research study that uses quantitative and qualitative techniques and procedures in combination. Since the research combines quantitative and qualitative research, the mixed-method of data collection appears thus to be the most appropriate for assisting to answer the research question.

![Figure 14: Research choices (Saunders, et al, 2009, p.152).](image)

### 3.6 Time Horizons

Saunders et al. (2009, p155) distinguished two types of times horizons that are cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies (see figure 12 above). Between these two types of time horizons, the cross-sectional is the one that is applicable to the proposed research project. Indeed, the dissertation focuses on the study of a phenomenon at a particular time in the ever-changing world of business organisations. I do not attempt to study change and development but I am interested to understand what is going on in our research area. This is the case of the
research where I am researching about the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchase decision-making process. The research is a ‘snapshot’ taken at a particular moment and does not attempt to study change and development of this increasing influence through the time.

3.7 Techniques and procedures

For the purpose of the research I have identified some variables that I was interested to study. Through this research, I was interested to find out the influence of the different social media types on consumers and especially on their purchasing decision-making process. I was also interested to find out how this influence was characterized according to the differences between consumers, especially cultural dimensions such as nationalities. I was thus interested to understand what variables were influenced consumers’ behaviours during their purchase decision-making process but also if there were trust issues between consumers that already know each other’s or peers that they never met before and interact with them on Social Media.

6 sections composed the questionnaire. Since I was looking to understand how the increasing influence of Social Media was characterized in the five different stages of the consumer’s purchase decision-making process, I have decided to allocate one section to each of the stages. The first section was thus dedicated to the ‘Need Recognition’ stage, the second section to the ‘Information Search’ the third section to the ‘Evaluation of Alternatives’ stage, the fourth section was dedicated to the ‘Decision Making’ stage and the fifth section to the ‘Postpurchase Behaviour’ stage. To don’t confuse respondents, these sections didn’t appeared directly on the questionnaire. They were only drawn for the design of the questionnaire and for analysing the data. The last section was dedicated to the demographic profile and was designed to get information about respondents’ age, nationality and educational backgrounds.
The questionnaire counts 41 questions and takes to respondent approximately between 5 and 10 minutes to answer.

In order to answer the research question, I have used both exploratory and descriptive studies. Saunders, et al, cited Robson (2002, p59) to define an exploratory study as a valuable mean of finding out ‘what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in new light. On the other hand, Saunders, et al, quoted Robson (2002, p59) to define a descriptive study as a mean to ‘portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations’. For the purpose of the research I needed to combine these two kinds of study since I have used both deductive and inductive approaches to answer the research question. Moreover, I have used descriptive study in order to test the theory. This has been done by collecting and analysing quantitative data through a survey. During the research I have also used an exploratory study through interviews and the collection of qualitative data in order to understand what was happening in the Social Media Marketing area.

3.7.1 Population and sample

The constraints of time and budget restricted data collection. Moreover it was impossible to collect data from an entire population since Social Media population is way to wide. I have thus decided to use sample of population (see figure 16 below). I have used a non-probability sample for the purpose of the research. For the sampling technique, I have used a purposive sample, that is to say, a non-representative subset of a larger population. I have thus administrated the survey to my own network of contacts through Social Media (on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter). The research being based on Social Media, it appeared thus as the most adapted to use these media to diffuse the survey. Furthermore, by doing so, I was sure that the respondents were familiar with Social Media platforms and tools. The sample has thus
been selected with personal bias but I was confident in the respondents’ answers and their abilities to spread the questionnaire since they were members of my network.

Moreover, in order to have more answers to the survey, I have also used the snowball method by asking the respondents to share the survey with their own network of contacts on Social Media. By doing this, I have succeeded to have a larger amount of respondents and thus collected more data to analyse. The use of word-of-mouth has helped to diffuse the questionnaire. Combining these two sampling methods helped me to have a lot of respondents in a short span of time and without any budget.

**Figure 16:** Sampling techniques (Saunders, et al 2009, p213).

### 3.7.2 Data collection

In order to answer the research question during the dissertation, I have used primary data collection. Using primary data collection allowed me to address specific issues to consumers about their use of Social Media and how these media specifically influence their purchase decision-making processes. Data collection was a critical part of the research since this was
the basement of the findings. Moreover, using primary data gave me a greater control on the collection of information. I have decided when I wanted to spread the questionnaire online and when I wanted to stop the collection of information. Data collection has started on the 05\textsuperscript{th} of August 2012 and has finished on the 25\textsuperscript{th} of August 2012. The collection has thus lasted 20 days. I didn’t want to have a data collection that last longer because I was limited with the short span of time dedicated to the dissertation writing and by the fact that I needed to keep enough days available to be able to best analyse and discuss the results of the questionnaire. 20 days was enough to get a large amount of respondents to the questionnaire.

For the creation of the questionnaire, I have used the function ‘forms’ available on Google Docs. This appeared to me as being the best option for designing the questionnaire since Google Docs is free of use and have no restrictions in the number of questions and answers comparing to other free software that I have tried before. Having the possibility to collect data for free with no limitations was an important issue for me since I needed to ask an important number of questions to be the most specific possible. Asking specific questions was paramount to best seize and determine the degrees of influence of Social Media on users. Moreover, the fact that there was no restriction in the number of respondents was an important factor in the research since I sought to collect the maximum of answers to have valuable findings. Most of software that I have found for free on the Internet were limited in the number of respondents possible and were thus really restrictive in the quest of answers. Furthermore I already had the chance to use Google Docs in the past so I was already familiar with its different functions available for designing the questionnaire and collecting the necessary data for the research.

Since I was seeking for both quantitative and qualitative data, I have thus, as explained above, combined both primary quantitative data collection and primary qualitative data collection. Using primary quantitative data collection allowed me to test the theory by
administrating the survey to an important number of people through the use of Social Media platforms and tools (such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn). Respondents were invited, by emails and by posts on Social Networks, to go on the link of the questionnaire and to submit it online.

Using Social Media’s platforms and tools as a way to collect data was very valuable in the case of the research since it allowed me to quickly share the survey by posting on Social Networks ‘feeds’ and sending messages to my contacts to ask them to share the survey to their own contacts.

Moreover in order to get more answers, I also have administered the questionnaire on students’ forums. This has been done by registering on certain forums, creating new topic and suggest to people to be part of the research by answering the questionnaire. The forums were:

- Thestudentroom.co.uk
- Internationalstudentforum.com
- Cyburbia.com
- Postgraduateforum.com

The choice of targeting student forums was a strategy since students are already familiar with the Social Media area and I was thus sure to be able to collect valuable data from these respondents and to reduce the margin or error (incomplete questionnaire). Moreover, all these forums are undergraduate or postgraduate forums and users are thus familiar with dissertations and understand the need I had to collect an important amount of answers. They are thus more likely to answer a dissertation survey and especially since a lot of them are present on these forums for the same purpose.

These four forums have been chosen because they were the four that appeared first on Google when searching with keywords such as ‘forums’, ‘social media’ ‘students’. Moreover they
were the one that seemed the most active since they have the biggest number of users and the biggest number of posts. This has proved to be a good strategy since I have succeeded to bring an important number of forums’ users to come to answer the questionnaire.

Since the administration of the questionnaire has been done only online, the administration of the survey has thus been electronic.

Some variables I have looked through the survey concerned the time of usage of Social Media platforms and tools and its influence on their consumers’ decision-making process. Nationality was also a preponderant variable in the study since I wanted to find out in particular if the influence of Social Media had cultural dimensions.

Saunders et al (2009, p321) pointed out that they are three types of primary qualitative data collection: semi-structured interviews, group and focus group. For the purpose of the research I did semi-structured interviews with two marketers. One interview has been done face-to-face in Paris and the other has been Internet mediated (on Skype) since the second interviewee works in South Korea, so it was complicated to meet face-to-face. Concerning the selection of interviewees, I have used a purposive sample. I wanted to interview two community managers working for international and famous companies. The fact that these companies are international is really important for the research where I also wanted to have different point of views according to the countries where they operate. Moreover, I wanted to have an interview with a product company (Starbucks) and a service company (Novotel). To find these two interviewees I have used my own network of contacts on LinkedIn to ask few of my contacts who work in the Marketing area to make connections between people and me from their own networks. By doing so, I have been put in relation with these two interviewees. These two interviewees are eligible to be respondents for this research since they are community managers for international companies and they are thus working everyday on
customer relationships and communication on Social Media. They appeared thus as being the best people to answer my interviews in this area of research.

Concerning data analysis, these interviews have been recorded on a recorder and I have later written the transcript of records on a word document.

In contrast with the survey, doing interviews allowed to have richer answers since I was able to go further into the respondents’ answers and get additional information. One of the parts of the research consisted to find out the implications for marketers arising from the findings of the self-administered questionnaire. Accordingly, by using semi-structured interviews I have been able to ask additional questions that provide deeper answer to the research question (Saunders, et al, 2009, p321). As said above, collecting primary qualitative data allowed me to compare and/or contrast the theory from the reality.

260 respondents representing 41 different nationalities have answered the questionnaire.

![Figure 15: Forms of interview (Saunders et al, 2009, p321).](image)
### 3.7.3 Data analysis

Concerning the analysis of quantitative data, Saunders, et al, (2009, p415) have identified personal-computer-based analysis software that can be used. Since, the survey will have different measurement levels, the analysis provided categorical responses but also ordinal (such as Likert scale) I have decided to use Microsoft Excel Software to analyse the data. I considered Excel as being excellent software for data analysis and graphic representation, the software also allowed me to do cross-tabulation. In contrast with software such as SPSS that allow to get significant results with ‘just a click’, Excel requires you to do most of the work in a manual manner. Analysing data with Excel allowed me to increase my competencies on this software. Moreover since I have used Google Docs to design the questionnaire and collect data, I have also used the analysis graphs tools offered by Google. Graphics representations were important in the analysis of the results since they allowed me to see and then analyse the results in a clear manner.

Concerning the analysis of qualitative data, I have listened the recorded interviews and wrote the most important aspects that were of interest to me to answer the research question. Moreover, I have organized the contents of the interviewees’ answers into coherent categories in order to be able to use the data. I have then draw relationships between these different categories.

### 3.8 Ethical issues

According to Saunders, et al (2009, p187), there are ethical issues that can have importance during the research. During the interviews with marketers, I might encounter some ethical issues regarding the sensitivity of questions that may be ask concerning the relationships
between their companies and Social Media. Indeed, some of the questions asked can appeared as being sensitive in the protection of companies’ Social Media’ strategies.

I have identified the most important ethical issues during the research as being the storage and keeping of data. It is paramount to protect the data in order to prevent it for being used by other people and especially for commercial purposes. To do so, I have stored and kept the data collected and their analysis in a safe place that cannot be found by a third person.

The protection of these data is important in order to protect the answers of our respondents and appears thus as a very important issue to me.

3.9 Limitations to the research

During the process of writing the dissertation, I have encountered some factors that appeared as being limitations to the research. The constraint of time and the constraint of budget have been important limitations. For academic reason, the research had to be conducted in a short span of time to be handed in September. This short span of time reduced the time available to do deeper secondary research and reduce the time allocated for the primary research. Moreover, during the time dedicated to write the thesis, I was working for a company in France and it was thus sometimes complicated to find the time and energy necessary to best carry out the research and write the dissertation. Furthermore, budget constraints reduced the possibility to travel to meet the interviewee that lived in different locations worldwide.

Concerning data collection, it is important to note that some disparities in the nationalities of respondents have been encountered since the survey has been administrated through my own network of contacts. The percentage of French respondents is the most
important in the results of the survey. This has to be remembered when drawing conclusions from the results

Doing interviews with Social Media Marketing professionals can also present some limits in the validity of their saying. Indeed, they might not have said the reality of the practices they do to influence consumers by using Social Media. This limit had to be bear in mind during the interviews.

Another constraint has been the geographic distance between my supervisor and me since I came back in my country for the last 3 months of research. The last and one of the most important limitations was the lack of information from the literature on the area. Indeed, the emergence of Social Media is really recent and I have sometimes encountered some problems to find a lot of valuable and accurate information on the subject.
### 3.10 Time Allocation

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*Table 1: Time Allocation*
4. Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of results coming from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. This chapter intends to present the results without trying to draw conclusions. In a first part I will present the results from the quantitative analysis by following the different stages of the purchasing decision-making process; and in the second part I will present the results from the qualitative analysis.

4.2 Main results from the quantitative analysis

4.2.1 Description of the sample

The sample used for my research is made up of 260 respondents representing 41 different nationalities (Table 2 in Appendix). 45 % of my respondents are male and 55 % are female (figure 18 below). As seen in figure 17 below, 92 % of respondents are between 18 and 34 years old.

![Figure 17: Age categories of the sample (Q.38).](chart)

```
4.2.2 Social Media Usage

As presented in figure 19 below, 95% of respondents have been using Social Media for more than 2 years now. 48% have been using it for 5 years and more and 47% between 2 and 5 years. Concerning the average of hours spent on Social Media per week, the figure 20 below shows that 23% of respondents said they used Social Media more than 10 hours per week, 27% between 5 and 10 hours and 29% between 2 to 5 hours per week.

Figure 18: Gender of respondents (Q.39).

Figure 19: How long consumers have been using Social media? (Q.2).
As seen in figure 21 below, consumers use Social Media for different reasons. The most important reasons are to keep in touch with people (97%), listen to music and watch videos (60%) and share their interests (58%). 46% of respondents said that they use Social Media to find information about products/services/brands.
As presented in figure 22 below, consumers access Social Media through different devices. 99% of consumers use a computer and 68% use smartphones. Only 17% of consumers use tablet computers and 2% of respondents said they used other devices (cell phones to post on Twitter).

![Figure 22: Devices used by consumers to access Social Media (Q.5).](image)

4.2.3 Brand Engagement

As shown in figure 23 below, 48% of consumers said that they followed brands on Social Media whereas 52% said that they didn’t. Furthermore, as presented in figure 24 below, there are several reasons that explain why consumers follow brands on Social Media. Indeed, 64% of consumers follow brands to get updates about products and services and 43% to read comments and reviews about products and services. 31% of consumers because they are current customers and 30% to get discounts or free products from brands. Only 12% follow brands to actually communicate with them.
Figure 23: Do consumers follow brands on Social Media? (Q.6).

Figure 24: Reasons to follow brands (Q.7).

Figure 25 below shows that 52% of consumers would recommend friends to follow certain brands. 30% of consumers said that they didn’t recommend brands to friends. As seen in figure 26 below, 49% of brand followers said that they were more likely to follow selected brands when their friends are already followers. In contrast, 35% of consumers said that they wouldn’t follow any brands because their friends are followers.
Figure 25: Likelihood to recommend a brand to a friend after being a follower (Q.8).

Figure 26: Likelihood to follow a brand when friends are already followers (Q.9).
4.2.4 Need Recognition

As presented in figure 27 below, 56% of consumers have ranked TV ads as being the most influential information channel. Social Media is the second most influential information channel. Then come Magazine and Internet ads with respectively 36% and 32%. Newspapers (21%), Posters (19%) and Radio ads (8%) count among the least influential information channels for consumers.

![Image of bar chart showing influence of different channels]

Figure 27: Most influential information channels on consumers (Q.10).

Figure 28 below shows the degree to which consumers think that seeing their friends talking or displaying pictures about products/services on Social Media can make them recognize a need. 47% of consumers agree with this statement when 30% neither agree nor disagree. In contrast, 14% of respondents disagree with this statement.

Moreover, as seen in figure 29 below, there are different categories for which consumers could recognize a need because of their friends’ activities on Social Media. 64% of consumers have ranked Entertainment as the first category and Travel as the second category (60%). In contrast, Household Appliance (9%) and Cars (8%) count among the least mentioned categories by consumers.
Figure 28: Do consumers think that seeing friends talking or displaying pictures about product/service on Social Media can make them recognize a need (Q.11).

Figure 29: Categories of products/services for which consumers could recognize a need because of their friends’ activities on Social Media (Q.12).

Regarding the likelihood for consumers to buy after following a brand on Social Media, figure 30 below shows that 59% of consumers said that they wouldn’t buy a brand because they are followers on Social Media.
**Figure 30:** Likelihood to buy after following a brand on Social Media (Q.13).

### 4.2.5 Information Search

As seen in figure 31 below, 88% of consumers said that they used Social Media to find information about products/services/brands. This use of Social Media for information search differs according to categories as demonstrated in figure 32 below. Indeed, Entertainment is ranked at the first category for information search by 60% of consumers. Travel is in second position with 58%. In contrast, Household Appliance (12%) and Cars (11%) are among the least mentioned categories by consumers.
Figure 31: Do consumers use Social Media to find information about products/services/brands? (Q.14).

Figure 32: Categories of purchase for which consumers use Social Media to search information (Q.15).
The study revealed that consumers used different Social Media types to find information about products/services/brands. As seen in figure 33 below, Reviews Sites (59%) and Social Networks (58%) are the most used by consumers. Then come Multimedia Sharing (46%), Forums (41%) and Blogs (30%).

![Figure 33: Social Media used to obtain information about products/services/brands (Q.16).]

4.2.6 Evaluation of Alternatives

The figure 34 below shows that 51% of consumers use Social Media platforms and tools to compare products/services/brands. As presented in figure 35 below, 36% of consumers never seek the opinion of people they don’t know before making a purchase while 25% never seek their friends’ opinions. In contrast, only 13% of consumers frequently seek their friends’ opinions. Consumers equally seek sometimes opinions from friends (21%) and people they don’t know (20%). 38% of consumers said that they rarely sought friends’ opinions and 17% the opinion of people they don’t know.
Figure 34: Use of Social Media to compare products/services/brands (Q.17).

Figure 35: Likelihood to seek opinions on Social media before making purchase decisions (Q.18-19).

The figure 36 below illustrates the fact that consumers don’t often ask peers’ opinions on Social Media when they hesitate between different products. 53% of consumers said that they never asked opinions to people they don’t know against 29% for consumers who never ask their friends’ ones. 30% of consumers rarely ask friends’ opinions against 25% for people they don’t knows’ opinions. 30% of consumers said that they sometimes asked their friends’ opinions when they hesitate against 16% to people they don’t know.
Figure 36: Likelihood of consumers to ask people’s opinion on Social Media when they hesitate between different product/services? (Q.20-21)

Figure 37 below shows that 54% of consumers agreed that they trusted their friends’ reviews and comments about products/services/brands on Social Media. 33% said that they neither agreed nor disagreed. In contrast, as seen in figure 38 below, only 34% of respondents said they agreed that they trust the reviews and comments of people they don’t know on Social Media. 40% said that they neither agreed nor disagreed and 16% that they disagreed.

Figure 37: Trust level in friends’ reviews and comment about products/services/brands on Social Media (Q.22).
Figure 38: Trust level in people they don’t knows’ reviews and comments about products/services/brands on Social Media (Q.23).

As presented in figures 39 and 40 below, 62% of consumers agreed that positive reviews and comments from friends about products/services/brands on Social Media could push them to make a purchase against 46% from people they don’t know. 20% neither agreed nor disagreed about the impact of positive reviews and comments from friends against 31 % from people they don’t know. In contrast, as seen in figures 41 and 42 below, a majority of consumers agreed that negative reviews and comments on Social Media could dissuade them from making a purchase (66% agreed when it comes from friends when 54% agreed when it comes from people they don’t know).
Figure 39: Impact of positive reviews and comments from friends on Social Media on purchase decision (Q.24).

Figure 40: Impact of positive reviews and comments from people they don’t know on Social Media on purchase decision (Q.25).
Figure 41: Impact of negative reviews and comments from friends on Social Media on purchase decision (Q.26).

Figure 42: Impact of negative reviews and comments from people they don’t know on Social Media on purchase decision (Q.27).
4.2.7 Purchase Decision

Figures 43 and 44 below point out that 49% of consumers said that they sometimes purchased after reading positive reviews on Social Media against 14% after reading negative reviews. Only 13% said that they would frequently purchase after reading positive reviews whereas only 3% after reading negative reviews. 54 % of consumers said that they would rarely purchase after reading negative reviews and 29% would rarely purchase after reading positive reviews and comments on Social Media.

**Figure 43:** Likelihood to purchase after reading positive reviews on Social Media (Q.28).

**Figure 44:** Likelihood to purchase after reading negative reviews on Social Media (Q.29).
As seen in figures 45 and 46 below, 51% of consumers agreed or strongly agreed that Social Media are more influential than traditional media in their final purchase decision. In contrast, they are 25% to disagree or strongly disagree and 24% to neither agree nor disagree. However, 50% of consumers agreed to say that Social Media play a role in their final decision to purchase while only 13% of them disagreed.

**Figure 45:** Is Social Media more influential than traditional media in consumers’ final purchase decision? (Q.30).

**Figure 46:** Does Social Media play a role in consumers’ final purchase decision? (Q.31).
4.2.8 Postpurchase Behaviour

The analysis highlighted that most of consumers said they didn’t rate or write reviews on Social Media after a purchase. As seen in figure 47 below, only 3 % frequently do it against 50 % that never do it. They are 28% to rarely rate or write reviews on Social Media.

![Figure 47: Likelihood to rate or write reviews on Social Media after a purchase (Q.32).](image)

Figure 48 below shows the likelihood of consumers to share their opinions to friends on Social Media after a purchase. Indeed, only 15 % frequently share their opinions to friends when they are not satisfied against 10% when they are satisfied. 29 % of consumers said that they sometimes shared their opinions to friends when they are not satisfied against 27 % when they are satisfied. 38% never share their opinions to friends when they are satisfied against 33 % when they are not satisfied. Furthermore, as presented in figure 49 below, a majority of consumers never share their opinions to people they don’t know on Social Media after a purchase; whether they are satisfied (53%) or not satisfied (54%). In the same way, only 3 % of consumers said that they frequently shared their opinions to people they don’t know.
As seen in figure 50 below, consumers share more or less their opinions according to categories of products and services on Social Media. Indeed, 55% of consumers have ranked Entertainment as the first category about which they share their opinions. Travel is in second position with 52% and Electronics in third position with 47%. In contrast, the analysis pointed...
out that only few consumers shared their opinions about Household Appliances (10%) and Cars (8%).

**Figure 50:** Categories of products/services/brands for which consumers share opinions on Social Media (Q.37).

4.3 Nationalities findings in the quantitative analysis

The following part is dedicated to highlight the noticeable differences according to the nationalities of consumers that have been found from the results.

**4.3.1 Nationalities impact in Brand Engagement**

As seen in figure 51 below, US consumers are the biggest followers of brands on Social Media with 67% of respondents against only 36% for Russians. For consumers who follow brands (figure 52), 75% of US consumers said that they would recommend few brands to their friends against 40% for Russians. In contrast, 39% of French consumers wouldn’t recommend brands against only 13% of Americans. Figure 53 below, pointed out that Russian consumers
are 60% to say that they are more likely to follow certain brands if their friends are already followers whereas only 40% of Swedish and 42% of French said they would.

**Figure 51:** Do consumers follow brands on Social Media? (Q.6).

**Figure 52:** Nationalities impact on the likelihood to recommend a brand to a friend after being a follower (Q.8).
4.3.2 Nationalities impact at the Need Recognition stage

As presented in figure 54 below, 64% of German and US consumers agreed that seeing their friends share content about products or services on Social Media could make them recognize new needs. In contrast, only 29% of Russians agreed. As seen in figure 55 below, the analysis revealed that following a brand on Social Media could push 62% of Swedish consumers to buy this brand against only 32% of Germans.

Figure 54: Do consumers think that seeing friends talk or display pictures about products/services on Social Media can make them recognize a need (Q.11).
4.3.3 Nationalities impact in the Information Search stage

As presented in figure 56 below, most of consumers use Social Media to find information about products/services/brands (100% of US consumers against 82% for French).

Figure 56: Nationalities impact on the use of Social Media to find information about products/services/brands? (Q.14).
As demonstrated in figure 57 below, consumers, according to their nationalities, use more or less certain types of Social Media to find information. Swedish use mainly Reviews Sites (77%) whereas US consumers prefer to use Social Networks (75%). Germans use both Reviews Sites and Multimedia Sharing (56%). Microblogging is barely used for this purpose except by US consumers (50%). French use almost equally Reviews Sites (66%), Social Networks (63%) and Forums (62%). Russians mainly use Social Networks (68%). Swedish people are also the biggest users of Forums with 69% of answers.

**Figure 57:** Social Media used to obtain information about products/services/brands (Q.16).
4.3.4 Nationalities impact at the Evaluation of Alternatives stage

To compare products and services, figure 58 below shows that a slight majority of Americans (58%), Russians (57%) and Swedish (54%) use Social Media tools. In contrast, French and Germans are 52% to say that they don’t use Social Media for this purpose.

![Figure 58](image)

**Figure 58:** Nationalities impact on the use of Social Media to compare products/services/brands (Q.17).

Figure 59 below shows that 50% of US consumers sometimes seek their friends’ opinions on Social Media before making a purchase when 42% of French said that they never did it. In contrast, if 32% of Germans never seek their friends’ opinions, figure 60 shows that they are 52% to say that they never do it with people they don’t know. It is interesting to note that if Russians are only 36% to sometimes seek friends’ opinions, they tend to ask sometimes more people they don’t know for their opinions (43%).
Figure 59: Nationalities impact on the likelihood to seek opinions from friends on Social media before making purchase decisions (Q.18).

Figure 60: Nationalities impact on the likelihood to seek opinions from people they don’t know on Social media before making purchase decisions (Q.19).

Figure 61 and 62 below, highlight that 69% of Swedish agreed that they trusted their friends’ reviews on Social Media against only 42% of Americans. In contrast, the analysis pointed out that only 31% of Swedish agreed that they trusted the reviews from people they don’t know against 48% of French.
Figure 61: Nationalities impact on the trust level in friends’ reviews and comment about products/services/brands on Social Media (Q.22).

Figure 62: Nationalities impact on the trust level in reviews and comments from people they don’t know reviews about products/services/brands on Social Media (Q.23).

Figure 63 below shows that Germans and French (68%) agreed that friends’ positive reviews on Social Media could push them to make their purchase decision. 16% of Germans and Swedish strongly agreed against only 4% of Russians. Moreover, 62% of Swedish agreed that
positive reviews from people they don’t know could push them to purchase against only 32% of Russians. 33% of US consumers disagreed with it.

**Figure 63:** Nationalities on the impact of positive reviews and comments from friends on Social Media on purchase decision (Q.24).

**Figure 64:** Nationalities on the impact of positive reviews and comments from people they don’t know on Social Media on purchase decision (Q.25).
Figure 65 below shows that 72% of Germans agree that negative reviews from friends would dissuade them from purchasing against 57% of Russians. Figures 65 and 66 shows that the fact that the negative reviews come from friends or people they don’t know doesn’t change the French consumers’ minds that almost equally agree that this would dissuade them from purchasing in any case. Germans (20%), Americans (17%) and Swedish (23%) said that negative reviews from people they don’t know wouldn’t dissuade them from purchasing.

**Figure 65:** Nationalities on the impact of negative reviews and comments from friends on Social Media on purchase decision (Q.26).

**Figure 66:** Nationalities on the impact of negative reviews and comments from people they don’t know on Social Media on purchase decision (Q.27).
4.3.5 Nationalities impact in the Purchase Decision stage

Figure 67 below shows that US consumers are 25% to frequently buy after reading positive reviews on Social Media whereas no Swedish consumers would do such. In contrast, as seen in figure 68 below, only 15% of Swedish said they would never purchase after reading negative reviews whereas 40% of Germans would never do it.

Figure 67: Nationalities impact on the likelihood to purchase after reading positive reviews on Social Media (Q.28).

Figure 68: Nationalities impact on the likelihood to purchase after reading negative reviews on Social Media (Q.29).
Figure 69 below indicates that 62% of Swedish agreed or strongly agreed that Social Media were more influent than traditional media in their purchase decision against only 32 % of Germans. 36% of Germans disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement when they are only 16% of Swedish to think so. If French (56%), Russians and Swedish (54%) agreed that Social Media played a role in their decision purchase, only 33% of Americans agreed with this statement (figure 70).

**Figure 69:** Is Social Media more influent than traditional media in consumers’ final purchase decision? (Q.30).

**Figure 70:** Does Social Media play a role in consumers’ final purchase decision? (Q.31).
4.3.6 Nationalities impact at the Postpurchase Behaviour stage

Figure 71 below highlights that most of consumers, regardless of their nationalities, never rate or write reviews on Social Media after a purchase, except Americans who are 50% to sometimes do it. In more details, figures 72 and 73 below show that a majority of Germans and French never share opinions to their friends, whether they are satisfied or not of a purchase. In contrast, Americans are 50% to sometimes do it with friends. If US consumers are 17% to frequently share their opinions to friends no matter if they are satisfied or not, the percentage of German consumers doubles when it comes to frequently share about an unsatisfied purchase (16%) against a satisfied purchase (8%).

**Figure 71:** Nationalities impact on the likelihood to rate or write reviews on Social Media after a purchase (Q.32).
Figure 72: Nationalities impact on the likelihood to share opinions to friends on Social Media after a satisfied purchase (Q.33).

Figure 73: Nationalities impact on the likelihood to share opinions to friends on Social Media after an unsatisfied purchase (Q.34).

As seen in figures 74 and 75 below, most of French (69 and 68%) and German (80%) consumers never share opinions to people they don’t know no matter if the purchase satisfied them or not. In contrast 33% of Americans sometimes share in both cases and 50% of them never do it.
**Figure 74:** Nationalities impact on the likelihood to share opinions to people they don’t know on Social Media after a satisfied purchase (Q.35).

**Figure 75:** Nationalities impact on the likelihood to share opinions to people they don’t know on Social Media after an unsatisfied purchase (Q.36).
4.4 Genders findings in the quantitative analysis

Other findings have been found concerning the differences of influence of Social Media according to gender. The following part is dedicated to highlight only the noticeable differences that have been found from the results.

4.4.1 Genders impact in Brand Engagement

Figure 76 below points out that females (53%) follow more brands on Social Media than males (44%). In the same way, figure 77 below shows that 55% of females are more likely to recommend certain brands to their friends than males (49%). Moreover, as seen in figure 78 below, 57% of females said that they were also more likely to start following certain brands because their friends are already followers. In contrast, males are 45% to do so.

Figure 76: Do consumers follow brands on Social Media? (Q.6).
4.4.2 Genders impact at the Need Recognition stage

Figure 79 below shows that 57% of females agreed or strongly agreed that seeing friends talking or displaying pictures about products or services on Social Media can make them recognize a need. In contrast only 42% of males agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.
Figure 79: Do consumers think that seeing friends talking or displaying pictures about product/service on Social Media can make them recognize a need (Q.11).

### 4.4.3 Genders impact at the Postpurchase Behaviour stage

When it comes to share their opinions to people they don’t know after a satisfied purchase, females are 56% to never do it against 41% for male (figure 80). In the same way, 55 % of females never share their opinions for an unsatisfied purchase (figure 81). Males count for 52%.

Figure 80: Likelihood to share opinions to people they don’t know on Social Media after a satisfied purchase (Q.35).
Figure 81: Likelihood to share opinions to people they don’t know on Social Media after an unsatisfied/satisfied purchase (Q.36).
4.5 Qualitative analysis

4.5.1 Social Media usage in companies

Both companies I interviewed use social Media, but similarities and differences appear in the platforms and tools used. Starbucks France and Novotel both use Facebook to ‘inform fans (customers) about the new products and services’. Novotel uses Twitter in addition to Facebook for their branding image and also uses Foursquare that ‘allow us to offer special discount’. Both companies use Facebook to communicate about their marketing campaigns and launch events. Damien Jacques, community manager at Novotel, added that Local Social Networks are also used according to the countries.

The study indicated that Social Media usage depends of companies’ objectives and targets. Starbucks France doesn’t use Twitter, Instagram and other Social Media types since they considered them as irrelevant to their activities. However, Maïlys Morand, from Starbucks France, added that they recently started to use YouTube to create interactive contents to engage with their customers.

4.5.2 Social Media to engage with customers and build loyalty

The interviews indicated that both companies see Social Media as a good way to engage with their customers and provide a good experience online. For Maïlys Morand, if customers have a good experience online they will ‘feel understood, listened by the brand and will be more likely to go into our stores’. Damien Jacques goes in the same way by adding that ‘providing a good experience to our customers plays a role in their consumption’. Damien Jacques stated that ‘having a connection with the users through Social Media helps us to establish a very long-term relationship that can lead to cross sell’.
To the questions asking if companies should allow consumers to share their opinions on the companies’ Social Media pages, both interviewees answered that interaction is the matter of Social Media. Moreover, the interviews indicated that by listening to their customers, companies could have more chance to know what they exactly want and could thus better adapt products to their customers’ needs. About the impact of bad comments, both interviewees said that they first tried to understand ‘what went wrong’ in order to be able to resolve the problems. If the problems have been proved to be the companies’ responsibilities, Starbucks France directs its customers to the customer service to reward them and Novotel offers discounts on the next purchases. By doing so, Novotel hopes to offer a better second experience to impress their customers that will say on their first comments that the brands really cared about them. The study indicated that the key was to react really quickly in order not to let the bad comments spread all over Social Media. By reacting quickly, they proved to their customers that they were listened to by the brands. Damien Jacques believes that bad comments are ‘only bad if you don’t handle them correctly’.

To the question ‘should companies reward good comments?’ the interviews pointed out that Novotel and Starbucks France had different visions. Damien Jacques from Novotel thinks that this is a mistake since ‘the whole system is working because of trust; give rewards to increase positive reviews and you will break the trust’. In contrast, Maïlys Morand said that companies should identify ‘influencers’ on Social Media and should send them targeted rewards such as invitations to special events or to try special/new products.

Concerning the use of Social Media to build loyalty, both interviewees think that companies should seize the opportunity offered by Social Media to build loyalty with their customers. At Novotel, a Social Media card has been created to collect points as rewards. To make their customers become more loyal they are invited to special events and asked to rate on Facebook the company’s performance in these events. At Starbucks France there is no
loyalty program for the moment due to the specificity that most ‘fans’ follow the brand on Social Media because they know the brand and not because they often go to their stores. Indeed, there are only few Starbucks in France and only 5% of their Social Media community lives nearby a Starbucks.

4.5.3 Social Media Versus Traditional Media

Both interviewees think that companies should not abandon traditional media to only focus on Social Media. The study indicated that the medium should depend on the target and that companies should remember that ‘most of older people don’t correctly use a computer and are not Social Media oriented as is the Generation Y’. Moreover, since not everyone is present on Social Media, it is paramount for companies to continue using other media channels for their promotion and communication. Maïlys Morand added that company could link different types of media such as ‘adding QR code on promotional leaflets to drive prospects on Facebook pages’.

4.5.4 Social Media usage according to Nationalities

Both interviewees think that companies should take the cultural dimension into account. At Starbucks France, Maïlys Morand said that ‘French are not the most active people on Social Media in the world’ and that companies thus have to adapt their communication depending on nationalities. For example at Starbucks France they organise ‘games’ on Social Media for their French customers because they know that French people are more likely to play games than ‘share pictures’ as some other nationalities would do. Damien Jacques believes that ‘Social Media’ as their name says are ‘Social’ and that companies should thus take into
account societal and cultural backgrounds. However, he reminds marketers that the first objective of a company is to sell and that this adaptation should be done only if it can help reach sales objectives.
5. Discussion, Limitations and Directions for Future research

5.1 Introduction

This study intended to see if the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process differs or not according to the different stages of this process. In this chapter, I will start to discuss about the influence of Social Media at the different stages and in a second part I will present the other findings that have been drawn from the quantitative analysis. In a third part I will present the implications arising from Social Media influence for marketers and in a fourth part I will discuss about the limitations of the research. The final part will be dedicated to recommendations for directions for future research.

5.2 Social Media influence in consumers’ purchasing decision-making process

This study demonstrated that the influence of Social Media differs according to the stages the consumers go through during the purchasing decision-making process. Depending on the stages of the process, the consumers appeared to be more or less influenced by Social Media.

5.2.1 Need Recognition

At the Need Recognition stage, the survey indicated that Social Media appeared to be really important in influencing consumers. More than half of the surveyed consumers agreed to say that they were influenced by their friends’ activities on Social Media platforms. Having the possibility to access contents shared by their peers, such as comments or pictures displayed
about products or services, proved to be an important factor that could trigger and make them recognise new needs.

It is important to note that the influence of Social Media depends also on the categories of products and services. Most of the needs that have been recognized by consumers through Social Media concerned a certain type of categories, namely entertainment, travel, clothes and electronics. Consumers didn’t seem to be really influenced when it comes to other products or services. This study also revealed that brand engagement was an important aspect at the Need Recognition stage on Social Media. Indeed, 48% of consumers follow brands on Social Media. It is paramount to note that consumers have quoted that they first reason to use Social Media is to keep in touch with people. In this context, the fact that almost half of the consumers are brand followers on Social Media gives opportunities to brands to make recognize new needs to their followers by engaging with them. In addition, 41% of consumers said in this study that they would buy a brand after following a brand on Social Media. Social Media platforms and tools provide a connection between consumers and brands that may trigger needs. The need recognition is reinforced by the fact that 64% of consumers reported that they were following brands on Social Media to get updates about their products and services. Getting updates from brands on their Facebook feeds for example increases the chance for brands to make consumers recognize new needs.

Moreover, more than half of the consumers stated that they were more likely to recommend certain brands to friends but also to follow certain brands because they saw that their friends were already followers. This study proved thus that consumers trusted their friends and were thus already more willing to have a good attitude toward a brand because their friends are followers. This possibility offered by Social Media for consumers to show that they are followers and can invite friends to do so increases need recognition possibilities for consumers. In this context, it is important to remember that the trust aspect represented by
word-of-mouth plays an important role within communities. The study demonstrated thus that the influence of Social Media seemed to be very strong at the Recognition Need stage.

5.2.2 Information Search

Concerning the influence of Social Media on consumers at their information search stage, the study highlighted that 88% of consumers stated they used Social Media when they were searching information about products, services and brands. If a wide variety of Social Media types are available to users to find information, the study revealed that consumers tended to use certain Social Media platforms and tools more than others. Reviews sites, Social Network platforms, forums and Multimedia sharing, are among the most used by consumers unlike other types such as Blog or Microblogging that seem to be less or almost not used by consumers in their information search stage. Consequently the influence of Social Media at the information search stage seems have different degrees depending on the Social Media types used for this purpose.

If it is now clear that Social Media’s influence at the information stage differs depending on the types. The study also pointed out that consumers used more or less Social Media according to the categories of products and services for which they are seeking information. Indeed, the study underscored that consumers tended to use Social Media primarily to find information about categories of products and services such as entertainment, travel, electronics and clothing. For other purchase categories, the study revealed that Social Media seemed to be less used at the information stage.

As discussed for the Need Recognition stage above, consumers also use Social Media to follow brands. Moreover, the study pointed out that 43% of consumers stated that they followed brands to read comments and reviews about products. Social Media provides the
possibility to consumers to search information directly on the brands’ fan page. As discussed in the literature review above, Hoyer and MacInnis (2010, p 389) stated that the relationships between consumers and companies had greatly changed thanks to a two-way communication offered by Social Media. However, if the study effectively pointed out that consumers were almost half to follow brands on Social Media, it also highlighted that only 12% of consumers were following brands to actually communicate with them.

The study shows thus that Social Media plays an important role of influence at the Information Search but this role should be considered as more or less influent according to the Social Media types and tools used by consumers. This observation also concerns the categories of products and services for which consumers search information.

5.2.3 Evaluation of Alternatives

The study indicated that half of the consumers (51%) take advantage of Social Media platforms and tools that are available to them to compare products, services and brands. The research demonstrated thus that if, as seen above, an important percentage of consumers used Social Media at their Information Search stage, only half of them used it for comparison purposes. Moreover, it is important to note that the study shows that only 6% of consumers frequently seek their friends’ opinions on Social Media when they are only 13% to frequently seek the opinion of people they don’t know. Moreover, the study also reported that consumers were very few to ask their peers’ opinions when they hesitated between different products. However, if it seems that consumers don’t seek their peers’ opinions about products, services and brands, the study revealed that consumers tended to trust their friends and people they don’t knows’ reviews and comments on Social Media. As discussed in the literature review above, Parker (2011) quoted the notion of ‘unbiased advice’ that consumers are more likely to
trust. The study confirms this observation by pointing out that 59% of consumers agreed or strongly agreed that they trusted their peers’ reviews and comments on Social Media.

Moreover, as seen above, Brown and Hayes (2008) said that messages delivered by trusted friends telling about their own experiences were highly influential. The study indicated that 62% of consumers agreed that positive reviews and comments from friends could help them evaluate alternatives between different products, services, and brands and finally push them to make a purchase. In the same way, the study highlighted that a majority of consumers agreed that negative reviews on Social Media would dissuade them to make a purchase. Therefore, the study revealed that peers’ reviews and comments on Social Media helped consumers to evaluate alternatives and could push or dissuade them from making a purchase. This finding confirms the observation made by the president of Online Nielsen quoted by Wheat and Dodd (2009, p3) stating that consumers' reliance on word-of-mouth in the decision-making process has increased significantly thanks to Social Media.

Furthermore, the study pointed out the tendency for consumers to have a passive approach since they would rather wait for information and trust word-of-mouth but will not ask peers for information that will help them evaluate alternatives.

To conclude, if consumers don’t take full advantage of the numerous possibilities offered by Social Media, in particular about comparison tools, the study highlighted that consumers trusted their peers’ evaluation and customers’ experience on Social Media (with a preference for their friends ‘ones). Social Media seem to play thus an important role of influence at the Evaluation of Alternatives stage, especially on the trust aspect provided by communities on Social Media.
5.2.4 Purchase Decision

The objective of the dissertation was to see if the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process had the same impact on the various stages. To do so, the study focused on discovering whether reviews and comments from peers could push or dissuade consumers from making their final decision to purchase. Therefore, the study revealed that only 13% of consumers would frequently purchase after reading positive reviews. In contrast, half of the consumers stated that they sometimes did so. Consequently it seems that Social Media are not as influential on the consumers at the moment of making their final decisions to purchase comparing to the important influence that Social Media exerts at the previous stages of the process. However it is important to note that the study pointed out that consumers were 51% to agree or strongly agree that Social Media was more influent than traditional media in their final purchase decision. This observation can be explained by the facts that Social Media seems to be of precious help for consumers at the previous stages; and more particularly at the Information Search and Evaluation Alternatives stages. Indeed, the fact that consumers have, thanks to Social Media, more possibilities to compare alternatives allows them to better decide whether they will purchase or not.

The research highlighted that if consumers stated that they were influenced by positive and negative reviews from their peers, they seemed to be the last decision makers and that other stimuli than Social Media influence appeared to play a role in the mind of consumers. The study revealed that Social Media is, as said in the literature review, influential at the Purchase Decision stage but it seems to be of a lower importance comparing with the influence that it exerts on the previous stages.
5.2.5 Postpurchase Behaviour

The study showed that the influence of Social Media was the weakest at the Postpurchase Behaviour stage. As presented in the literature review above, Jaffe (2010) stated that consumers today used Social Media to talk about their own good or bad experiences by sharing feedback and opinions with their peers. However the study that I undertook found that most of consumers didn’t rate or write reviews on Social Media after a purchase. It seemed thus that consumers didn’t often share their consumers’ experiences and opinions about products, services and brands on Social Media. Indeed, the study reported that only 10 % of consumers shared frequently their opinions to their friends on Social Media when they were satisfied of a product. We could maybe think that consumers tend to talk more to their friends about their consumers’ experiences when they are not satisfied about a product or services but the study revealed that they are in fact only 15% to frequently do so. The result is even worse concerning consumers’ experiences and opinions shared to peers that they don’t know on Social Media. Indeed, the study found that only 3% of consumers frequently shared their opinions to people they don’t know on Social Media whether they were satisfied or not. It is important to note that the study highlighted that there was no difference in the fact that consumers shared their experiences depending on their degrees of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In both cases, only a very small percentage of consumers frequently do it.

Furthermore, in the research I wanted to look closer at this small number of consumers in order to see if consumers tend to share more or less their good or bad experiences with their peers depending on the categories or products and services. The study pointed out that consumers shared more about some categories such as entertainment, travel and electronics. Except for the clothing category, it seems that consumers always use Social Media to share about the same kind of categories of products and services.
To conclude with this stage, the study revealed thus that consumers liked to find consumers’ experiences on Social Media at their Information Search and Evaluation of Alternatives stages in order to make their mind for their own purchasing decision-making process. However, they don’t like sharing their own good or bad experiences to their peers on Social Media. The influence of Social Media seems thus be lower and of a smaller importance at the Postpurchase Behaviour stage compared to the previous stages of the consumer’s purchasing decision-making process.

5.3 Other findings

During the research I wanted to see if the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process could differ in the various stages because of cultural differences. The study pointed out some interesting findings about the impact of nationalities in this process.

5.3.1 The influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process in relation to nationalities.

Nationalities impact at the Need Recognition stage

The study reported that American, German and Swedish consumers were more than 60% to agree or strongly agree that seeing their friends share contents about products or services on Social Media platforms could trigger needs. In contrast Russian consumers were not even one-third to think so. The study also revealed that cultural differences had an impact on the diffusion of brands between consumers. Indeed, the survey indicated that, if 75% of US consumers would recommend few brands to their friends, only 40% of Russians were willing
to do so. In contrast, it is interesting to point out that the study indicates that the ratio is reversed when it comes to following certain brands because friends are already fans. A majority of Russians (60%) stated that they would do so against only half of the Americans.

Concerning the transformation of ‘being a brand follower’ into a concrete act of purchase, the study reported that following a brand on Social Media could push almost two-third of Swedish consumers to buy this brand whereas only one-third of Germans would do the same. The study seems thus to show that cultural background makes the influence of Social Media more or less important at the Recognition Need stage depending on the nationalities of consumers.

**Nationalities impact at the Information Search stage**

The study reported that if consumers mainly used Social Media to search for information, no matter their nationalities, it is important to note that they didn’t use the same types of Social Media in their information search stage. For example, Americans consumers are half to use Microblogging to find information whereas other nationalities observed during the study use this type of Social Media only sporadically. This is an important finding for marketers that should be aware that they might have a limited influence on the information search stage of consumers depending on the Social Media platforms and tools they use to communicate toward certain nationalities of consumers.
Nationalities impact at the Evaluation of Alternatives stage

The study revealed interesting differences in the influence exerted by Social Media at this stage of the process. Indeed, nationalities seemed to impact the tendency for consumers to seek their peers’ opinions. In this way, the study indicated that half of US consumers sometimes sought their friends’ opinions on Social Media when almost half of French said that they never did it. More than simply seeking opinions, it is also the level of trust in peers’ opinions that appeared to be marked by nationalities. For instance, the study reported that Swedish consumers were among the ones who trusted the more their friends’ reviews and comments on Social Media whereas Americans consumers didn’t majoritarily trust them. A possible explanation is that societal and cultural backgrounds play a role in the degrees of influence of peers on consumers. Indeed, it is interesting to observe that the Swedish society is collective while Americans consumers evolve in a more individualist society. The study highlighted that the influence exerted by Social Media at this stage seemed to be more or less important depending on the nationalities of consumers.

Nationalities impact at the Purchase Decision stage

Concerning the fourth step of the consumer’s purchasing decision-making process, the study pointed out that the impact of positive or negative reviews to push or dissuade consumers from purchasing was more or less important depending on nationalities. Indeed, the survey indicated that 62% of Swedish consumers said they were more likely to buy a product or service after reading positive reviews from people they don’t know on Social Media whereas only one-third of American and Russian consumers would do so. Social Media’s influence appeared thus as being different depending on the nationalities of consumers; this observation is reinforced by the fact that only 32% of Germans consumers consider Social Media as being
more influential than traditional media while 62% of Swedish think the same. The influence of Social Media at the purchase decision stage seems thus to be really different depending on the nationalities of customers.

Nationalities impact at the Postpurchase Behaviour stage

The survey shows that nationalities have less impact on the degrees of influence of Social media at the Postpurchase behaviour stage comparing to the previous stages. Indeed, the survey indicated that most of consumers, regardless of their nationalities, never rated or wrote reviews on Social Media whether their experience had been positive or negative. This is consistent with the observation made above, concerning the fact that consumers don’t often share their opinions within the communities on Social Media.

To conclude with this part, it is important to note that the influence of Social Media thus differs at every stage of the purchasing decision-making process depending on the nationalities of consumers. This observation, highlighted by the study, generates thus implications for marketers that would have to adapt according to cultural specificities.
5.3.2 The influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process in relation to genders

**Genders’ impact in Brand Engagement**

Genders appear to impact engagement between consumers and brands. The study indicated that females tend to follow more brands on Social Media than males. This is interesting for companies that should know that genders impact the first contact they can have with customers on Social Media. Moreover, the study revealed that females are more likely to recommend certain brands to their friends than males. Females appeared thus to be a more important vector of brand spreading on Social Media in comparison with males. The research also indicated that females are more likely to start following certain brands because their friends are already followers than males. These two findings should be bear in mind by companies that could diffuse, in an easier way, their brands’ pages on Social Media by communicating towards females.

**Genders’ impact at the Need Recognition stage**

The study indicated that females are more likely to recognize new needs on Social Media, when their friends share contents about products, services, and brands on Social Media, than males. Genders seem thus to play a role in the degrees of the influence of Social Media at this stage.
Genders’ impact at the Postpurchase Behaviour stage

The study found out, that if most of consumers don’t share their opinions to people they don’t know after a satisfied purchase, males tend to share more their opinions comparing to females. However, concerning an unsatisfied purchase, no noticeable differences have been found depending on the consumers’ genders. This means that male tend to share more their opinions to people they don’t know when they are satisfied rather than female.

5.4 Implications for Marketers

The findings from the study confirm a certain number of implications for marketers presented in the literature review and address other implications that marketers should bear in mind to seize the opportunities offered by Social Media.

5.4.1 Engage with customers

The study confirmed the literature review that said that companies should use the opportunity of interaction offered by Social Media to engage with their community of followers. Klaus and Maklan (2011, p772) stated that the Internet had transformed initial relationship between consumers and marketers into collaborative relationships. The study confirmed this statement by adding that Social Media offered the possibility to marketers to show to their customers that they were really listening to them and thus proved that they cared about their customers’ expectations. The study indicated that by proving to their customers that they were listened to, companies made them feel understood and customers would be more likely to go into stores to purchase. Moreover, the observation made by Sweeney and Craig (2011, XV) in the literature review above, that says that Social Media helps enhance relationships with
customers, is confirmed by the study. Indeed, the study pointed out that that Social Media can help create very long term relationships that can lead to cross sell. The very long-term relationship aspect, noticed by Damien Jacques in the study, is important when it comes to build loyalty for companies. Social Media by its interaction features encourages the conversation with consumers. The study confirmed Parker’s argument (2011) in the literature reviews that said that ‘asking for members input instils a sense of empowerment’. This is this sense of empowerment and the spread of positive word-of-mouth within communities that will make consumers become more loyal to companies.

Moreover, the study confirmed the remark made by Zarrella (2010, p.187) about influencers. The study indicated that only a minority of consumers actually posted comments and reviewed products and services on Social Media. This observation implies that marketers should identify who are the influencers and communicate with them by sending them targeting messages. The interviews revealed that marketers could offer them to test new products and services or invite them to special events. By doing so, marketers can try to influence the influencers who will thus through their comments and reviews influence the rest of the community.

5.4.2 Be Reactive and Proactive

The literature review (Brown and Hayes 2008) stated that word-of-mouth was an important aspect to be taken into account by marketers concerning the great power of influence of Social Media on consumers. Indeed, word-of-mouth can be spread on Social Media like never before. This is especially the case concerning bad comments that can be really destructive to companies. Therefore, the study indicated that marketers should be able to handle customers’ bad comments in order to turn them into their advantages. Damien Jacques in his interview
stated that bad comments were only bad if you didn’t handle them correctly. If marketers are reactive to bad comments, which imply a quick and polite answer, and offer customers compensation or a second customer experience, they can prove to the community that the companies care about their customers and are able to compensate them.

Moreover, the study indicated that in addition to be reactive, marketers should be proactive by anticipating their customers’ expectations. Social Media offer them this great opportunity. Indeed, by engaging with customers on Social Media platforms, marketers can have feedbacks about the products, services or the brand and will be able to increase their products’ quality and to anticipate the future demand of their consumers. Being reactive and proactive will help companies gain and sustain competitive advantages over rivals.

5.4.3 Adapt to the communities’ specificities

The study revealed that cultural backgrounds such as nationalities could impact the influence of Social Media on their consumers. Therefore, marketers should adapt to the cultural specificities when engaging with customers. The study indicated that marketers needed to determine who their customers were within the communities and what their characteristics were depending on their nationalities. For example the study found that French customers were more likely to play ‘games’ on Social Media whereas American consumers prefer to ‘share pictures’ on Social Media. Marketers who want to interact with French consumers on Social Media need thus to bear in mind that they need to adapt to the specificities of the countries. This is reinforced by the observation of Damien Jacques who stated that his company used main Social Network platforms but also used Local Social Network in combination since it is more adapted to the countries where they operate.
5.4.4 Be careful with rewards

The study revealed that marketers should be careful if they want to reward positive reviews. By rewarding positive reviews there is a risk of breaking the trust. The qualitative analysis highlighted that the whole Social Media system was working because of the trust. This is coherent with the findings made in the quantitative analysis that pointed out that customers tended to trust their friends’ reviews and comments on Social Media. This notion of trust confirms the statement made by Parker (2011, p273), in the literature review above, that talked about the notion of ‘unbiased advice’ that consumers are more likely to trust. Marketers need thus to take this into account and be careful not to break the trust offered by Social Media. Moreover, the study indicated that if companies rewarded customers for posting positive reviews and comments on Social Media they wouldn’t be able to see what was going wrong with their products. Indeed, reward positive comments might hide product weaknesses; this wouldn’t allow companies to be able to resolve real problems. The study indicated thus that marketers should be really careful when rewarding customers on Social Media.

5.4.5 Don’t only focus on Social Media

The study indicated that even if Social Media have changed the marketing landscape, especially thanks to the two-way communication that it provides to customers, marketers should bear in mind that they shouldn’t abandon traditional media channels in favour of Social Media. Indeed, Social Media is not well adapted to all kind of products, services and targets. The study pointed out that Social Media was for example not adapted to ‘older generations’ that are not as Social Media oriented as is the Generation Y. The study revealed thus that marketers should use Social Media only when it is adapted and to communicate toward a certain kind of targets that are actually using Social Media. Moreover, the study
reported that Social Media could be used in combination with traditional media. This can be done for example by adding QR code on promotional leaflets to drive prospects on Facebook pages. Social Media offer new possibilities to marketers that would be more valuable if they are used in combination with other media channels.

5.5 Limitations

It is important to note that this research intended to see whether the increasing influence of Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process differed or not according to the various stages. Few limitations have been encountered when drawing conclusions from this study. The research has been limited in the number of respondents for practical reasons. The sample used cannot be representative of the entire population and the conclusions are thus difficult to draw on a small sample like this one. Indeed, the sample is not representative enough of all categories of age since it is more focused on the 18-34 year old categories, which are not the only ones that can be influenced in their purchasing decision-making process by Social Media. Also, the sample is limited in the number of respondents from different nationalities that have been selected for the analysis. The study highlighted that genders can impact the influence of Social Media. However the limitations in word counts and time allocated for the research didn’t allow to go in more depth about these findings.
5.6 Directions for future researches

As presented above, the study indicated that some characteristics such as nationalities seemed to have an impact on the influence of Social Media on consumers during their purchase decision-making process. Therefore, additional research is recommended to go deeper in the analysis of the impact of cultural dimensions on the Social Media influence. Moreover, it would be really interesting, through future research, to find out whether other characteristics such as the age and the gender of consumers can change the degree of influence of Social Media on their purchasing decision-making process. Recently, Social Media started to be considered by companies as a way to engage and influence their consumers. This additional research could thus help them gain a better understanding of the factors that play a role in this increasing influence.
6. Conclusion

These last years, we have seen the emergence of a new type of media that allows a wide range of interaction possibilities between users. These media are called Social Media because of the social features that they offer to the communities that they host. Year over year more people have been using Social Media platforms and tools and every year new Social Media types are developing, bringing new possibilities for users.

The literature review argued that the recent emergence of Social Media had drastically changed the marketing landscape. Authors in the literature stated that ads ‘don’t work anymore’ and that the time of traditional marketing, where marketers were pushing out messages toward consumers by a one-way communication, was resolved.

Companies started to see the opportunities to be present on Social Media to engage with their customers through a two-way communication opposed at the one-way communication previously used by marketers. The literature review discussed about the ease offered by Social Media to carry word-of-mouth, which has been demonstrated as a paramount factor to vehicle influence between people. Indeed, Social Media can carry and spread word-of-mouth between millions of user. The literature review demonstrated that we have been witness these last years to a shift in the consumer behaviour from being ‘consumers as viewers’, since consumers were nowadays more likely to be participating than watching.

The review of the literature highlighted that consumers go through five different stages when it come to purchase. These 5 stages put together form the consumer’s purchasing decision process. Different models seen in the literature agreed that the five stages were the Need Recognition, the Information Search, the Evaluation of Alternatives, the Purchase Decision and the Postpurchase behaviour stages. The review of the literature indicated that
Social Media played a role of influence at every stage of the consumers’ purchasing decision-making process.

The literature review pointed out that peers had always influenced consumers during their purchase decision-making process and that this observation applied also to Social Media. However if previous studies have made clear that Social Media have a power of influence on consumers’ purchasing decision-making, an important lack of research, explaining how Social Media’s influence is concretely characterized and what is its exact role plays at the different stages of the consumers’ purchasing decision-making process, has been noticed.

The study therefore, aimed to explain how the influence of Social Media was reflected on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process and to see if the influence of Social Media differed at the various stages of the consumer’s purchasing decision-making process. To do so, a quantitative and a qualitative analysis have been used in combination. A questionnaire (quantitative) has been administrated to 260 respondents through Social Networks platforms. To highlight the implications arising from Social Media for marketers, semi-structured interviews (qualitative) have been made with two Social marketing professionals.

Concerning the main findings, the study indicated that the influence of Social Media was different according to the stages of the consumer’s purchasing decision-making process. The influence of Social Media appeared to be stronger at the first stages and become weaker at the last stages of the process.

At the Need Recognition stage, the study revealed that consumers were well influenced by their friends’ activities on Social Media that could make them recognize needs. In addition, the study indicated that almost half of consumers were following brands on Social
Media and that an important part of these customers stated that they might recognize new needs because of this interaction with brands.

At the Information Search stage, the study indicated that almost 9 consumers out of 10 used Social Media to find information about products, services and brands. Indeed, the study highlighted that the different Social Media types offered several possibilities for consumers to have access to a wide range of information.

The influence is reinforced by the fact that an important part of consumers follow brands on Social Media to get updates about products and services.

At the Evaluation of Alternatives stage, the study found that only half of consumers currently used Social Media to compare products, services and brands together. The study also pointed out that consumers didn’t tend to ask their peers’ opinion when they hesitated between different products or services and that they were more likely to read information rather than ask. However, at this stage, the trust aspect plays an important role. Indeed, almost two-third of respondents indicated that they trusted their peers’ reviews on Social Media. This finding illustrates the notion of ‘unbiased advice’ offered by Social Media that seems to be a great factor in the influence on consumers at this stage.

At the Purchase Decision stage, the study revealed that Social Media had less influence in this stage compared with the three previous stages. Even if the study indicated that positive reviews could push them to purchase and negative reviews could dissuade them to purchase, it seems that consumers are the last decisions makers and that there are other stimuli and factors that have to be taken into consideration. The influence of Social Media has been found of a lower importance compared to the previous stages.

At the Postpurchase Behaviour stage, the study indicated that the influence of Social Media was the weakest compared to the other stages of the consumers’ purchasing decision-
making process. The study indicated that contrary to what had been said in the literature review, only few consumers shared their opinions to their peers on Social Media. The study revealed that most of consumers liked reading their peers’ reviews about products, services and brands but that they didn’t bother to share about their experiences, no matter if they were satisfied or not.

The study has also highlighted other findings that are of interest. The influence of Social Media has been found different depending on the Social Media types used. Moreover, the study indicated that the degree of influence of Social Media also depended on the categories of products and services.

Another important finding from the research is that the influence of Social Media also differs depending on cultural background such as nationalities. Indeed, the study indicated that consumers depending on their nationalities appeared more or less influenced by Social Media at the various stages of their purchasing decision-making processes. Moreover, the study also found that genders have impacted the influence of Social Media at certain changes.

The increasing use of Social Media by consumers and companies, and the findings of this study brought new implications to marketers. Therefore, marketers should seize the opportunity of interactions offered by Social Media to engage with customers, show to their communities that they listen to them and care about them. Marketers can thus build long-term relationships and enhance the loyalty of their customers. As discussed above, a minority of consumers influences peers with its reviews and comments. The study indicated that marketers should identify these ‘influencers’ and communicate with them. The study also highlighted the necessity for marketers to be reactive and proactive. They should listen to their customers and answer quickly to them in case of a problem in order not to let bad word-of-mouth spread all over Social Media. Moreover, by listening to their customers’ wants, the
study pointed out that marketers would be able to anticipate the future demands of their customers.

The nationality factor should also be taken into account by marketers who need to adapt their communication messages depending on the nationalities of people in their communities. To do so, the study indicated that Local Social Networks could thus be used in addition to the most famous ones.

Concerning rewards, the study revealed that marketers should be careful when rewarding their customers on Social Media. Indeed, the whole system of Social Media is working because of trust. The notion of ‘unbiased advice’ is really important to customers that tend to trust their peers. Consequently, marketers should be careful not to destroy the trust aspect of Social Media.

Finally, the study pointed out that marketers should not abandon traditional media in favour of Social Media since a lot of consumers are not ‘Social Media oriented’. The study indicated that different media channels could be used in combination with Social Media.

The study has been limited by few factors such as the sample that can be considered as too small and not representative enough of the entire population. Disparities have been enunciated such as an overrepresentation of two age categories at the expense of others. Concerning the other findings about nationalities impact, the study was limited to the five biggest nationalities represented by respondents in this sample and cannot thus be representative enough. Furthermore, the restriction in word count and in the time scale available for the dissertation didn’t allow me to go as deep I wanted to go in the analysis especially on some variables such as age and gender.

Therefore, directions for future research have been indicated. It would be really interesting to research the impacts that might have some characteristics, such as gender and
age, and a deeper analysis about cultural background on the influence of Social Media at the different stages of the consumer’s purchasing decision-making process. Social Media are becoming more used every year by consumers and more research is needed to understand the influence that can have Social Media on consumers’ purchasing decision-making process.
7. Self Reflection on Own Learning and Performance

7.1 Introduction

The MBS programme and the dissertation process provided me with academic knowledge but also with personal knowledge that will be useful as an individual and for my future career. This chapter of the dissertation will discuss about learning situations that have been met during this process and how it has added value to me. The first part will be dedicated to a reflection on the various theories of learning and will present the ones that best apply to me. The second part will present the personal achievements that have been made and the third part will examine the problems that I have encountered. The fourth part will be subject to discussion about the values that have been added by the programme and the fifth part will present the action plan designed to implement my learning.

7.2 Learning Style Theories

There are two mains theories in the literature related to learning styles: Kolb’s learning cycle (1974) and Honey and Mumford (1986). Kolb (1974) pointed out the importance for the learner to use a variety of learning styles and suggested that effective learning should proceed around a cycle. The four learning styles of Kolb’s theory are: concrete experience (learn by doing something), reflective observation (think about what has happened), abstract conceptualization (drawing conclusions) and active experimentation (test the theory in the future). These four learning styles can, as seen in figure 76 below, be associated in parallel to Honey and Mumford (1986)’s theory that four distinct styles used by learner. These four styles are: activist (learn by doing), reflector (learn by observing and think about what
happened), theorist (understand the theories behind actions) and pragmatists (experiment the theory in the future).

These two theories agreed to say that most of people follow only one or two of these learning styles and emphasize on the fact that different learning styles could be adapted depending on the nature of activities. Moreover the theories said that learners who know their predominant earning styles will be more able to judge how likely an activity is helpful to them.

![Diagram of Kolb and Honey and Mumford learning styles associated together](image)

**Figure 76**: Kolb and Honey and Mumford learning styles associated together

I consider my predominant learning style as Activist – Concrete Experience. I realised that I usually learned better by doing things. I need to do concrete experience to understand the theory. However the dissertation required me to use more than one learning style. Indeed a part of the dissertation is dedicated to a review of the literature on the area I am interested with and another part is dedicated to research. I have used three learning styles during the dissertation. Indeed, the literature review made me employ two learning styles that are reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. Reflective observation was applied when I was trying to understand what shift happened in the influence of consumers’ purchasing decision-making process that occurred with the recent emergence of Social Media.
I have thus observed and tried to understand what has been happening this last decade. The second theory used during the literature review was the abstract conceptualization. Indeed I had to form abstract on the various theories and models of consumers’ purchasing decision-making process in order to think about how the influence of Social Media could be reflected on the various stages of the process. Finally I have used my predominant style that is Activist-Concrete experience. This learning style has been used through the research part where I had to perform few tasks such as designing a questionnaire, administrate it to respondents and analyse data through graphs for instance.

Thanks to the programme I understand that I tend to rely too much on my dominant learning style and that combining it to other learning styles could be valuable. Also, by using two other learning styles it allowed me to strengthen these styles and made me aware of new ways of learning and will probably help me to be a better learner in the future.

7.3 Personal Achievements

The programme and the dissertation provided me with personal achievements. During the MBS program I had to write assignments for all my courses. I have always put a lot of efforts into it in order to get the best grades possible. These efforts have not be vain since I achieved to get great results that will be really valuable to obtain my degree and showed me that I was able to get great results thanks to hard work. During the dissertation I have demonstrated the importance of building a solid network of contacts. Indeed, the two people I interviewed are members of my network and work for world-renowned companies. Also, the 260 respondents are mainly members of my network of contacts and of my contacts’ own networks. The fact that I succeeded to have 41 different nationalities represented in my sample was for me an important achievement that showed me the diversity of my network of contacts. This is an
important point for me since I want to work in international trade after this degree and I know that I will be able to rely on such network.

After the diffusion of the questionnaire to the respondents I received a lot of encouraging feedbacks telling me that they found the questionnaire really serious and that it was easy to understand even if they were not experts in my area of research. This was exactly what I wanted to reach: a questionnaire easy to understand for non-experts but that still goes deep in my respondents’ insights.

7.4 Problems Encountered

Few problems have been encountered during the programme and the dissertation.

All along the year I have met an issue about shortage of time. Indeed, during the year spent at Dublin Business School I had a part time job to help me finance my college degree. I thus had to find ways to better manage my time. Moreover, when I was writing the dissertation back in my country, I had a job at the same time. It was thus complicated for me to have sufficient time for the dissertation. So I decided to turn the time spent in the commuters every day on my way to work into valuable time to perform tasks for the dissertation such as read literature on the subject, design my questionnaire and analyse part of the data. This has been revealed to be a good tactic as it helped me to move faster in the dissertation.

This was the first time I had to write such an important piece of work during my studies despite the assignments I had to hand in throughout the year. So I have met some difficulties to sometimes understand some specific of the dissertation and more especially concerning referencing. To resolve this problem, I have often communicated with my supervisor that gave me advice on the parts where I had doubts. Moreover, I have use Dublin Business
School Library’s documents such as ‘writing a literature reviews’ and Harvard Referencing’ that have proved to be of a valuable help.

**7.5 Value Added by the Programme**

**Time management**

During my degree I sometimes felt like I wouldn’t have enough time to hand my assignments and the dissertation on time. Every time this feeling occurred I decided to use some of my time to correctly plan the different tasks I had to perform to finish by the deadline. This has always proved to be a good strategy. I learnt that I sometimes have to stop working to plan my actions even if I feel like wasting time at first. This will definitely help me in my personal life but also in my future career where I will have to better manage my time if I want to perform my tasks with success.

**Trust in other people’s work and importance of collaboration**

As discussed above about my learning style, I learn by doing things. I thus need to do the things and make mistakes to draw lessons. All along the degree, I have learnt that I sometimes had to avoid making mistakes because it was time consuming. I learnt this year that I had to trust more other people’s works, especially in the literature review in the dissertation, and that I am not infallible and can be wrong sometimes. In this way I also realized the importance of collaboration in coursework in team during the programme but also in the dissertation. I learnt that I cannot do everything by myself and that I sometimes need to rely more on other people that can help me. For instance in the dissertation I have interviewed people who have brought me a lot of knowledge and given me some ideas that I should explore or abandon.
Collaboration has also proved to be necessary when I asked people to answer but also to share my questionnaire, without this collaboration I wouldn’t probably have succeeded to get so many respondents.

**Persistence is a new key word of my vocabulary**

This degree taught me a life lesson ‘keep working harder when it becomes rougher’. I sometimes felt like I was lost in my assignments and in the dissertation and that I wouldn’t be able to do it. Every time I started to doubt about the quality of my work I decided to work harder. This was the case with all these personalised emails that I had to send on Social Networks platforms to convince people to answer my questionnaire but also to spread it to their own networks. After finishing with this task I had to start analysing the big amount of data collected and I felt like I would never finish it. Nevertheless I never gave up in the difficulties and have now more confidence in my ability to be persistent in work.

**7.6 Action Plan**

The MBS programme through various assignments and the dissertation made me realise how important it was to use learning styles I don’t often use in order to be more performing. I have thus decided to set up an action plan that will help me continue to improve my abilities with different learning styles.

Therefore, when I start my career I will keep a diary on which I will write about the important experiences I lived at work. Keeping this diary will allow me to read it when necessary and thus start a reflective learning from the observations I would have noted.
I also plan to read newspapers and journals concerning my business area and be aware of arising trends. I believe that reading newspapers and journals at least once a week will help me to better understand what is going on in my business area and will lead me to better anticipate.

As I have a predominant activist learning style, I will force myself to improve my theorist learning style by trying to understand the theories behind actions. Trying to link the theories with the major events happening in my business area could help me to improve this style.

There are not really time scales and target dates for this action plan since I reckon that these actions should be considered as an ongoing process.

**7.7 Conclusion**

This part helped me to do a self-reflection on my own learning and performance that I would have probably not done if it wasn’t a required part of the dissertation. This shows the importance of such a part in the dissertation that allowed me to introspection and to have better insights on my performance. I believe that this awareness will be a valuable help to improve my skills for the future.

I have discussed about the difficulties encountered during this degree and how I have succeeded to overcome them. I have also discussed about my achievements and the value added by the programme that will be a precious help on a personal scale and for my future career. I am now aware of my learning style and that I sometimes had to adapt to other learning styles if want to be more performing. To conclude, I have sated up an action plan to continue to progress my learning and apply them in the future.
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**World Wide Web**


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Appendices

Appendix A. Questionnaire

The Influence Of Social Media On Consumers’ Purchasing Decision-Making Process

I am a postgraduate student at Dublin Business School, and for the purpose of my thesis I am conducting research on the influence of Social Media on consumers' purchase decision-making process.

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire which takes around 5-10 minutes to complete.

For reminder, Social Media is the generic name for platforms and tools such as:

- Social networking (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace...),
- Microblogging (e.g. Twitter, FriendFeed...),
- Multimedia sharing (e.g. YouTube, Dailymotion, Flickr...),
- Reviews and opinions (e.g. Epinions, TripAdvisor...),
- Social bookmarking (e.g. Digg, StumbleUpon, Delicious...),
- Blogging (e.g. TypePad, WordPress, Blogger...),
- Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia...),
- Forums

All information received will be confidential.

* Required
1- Do you use Social Media? *
(If no, end of the questionnaire)
- Yes
- No

2- How long have you been using Social Media? *
- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- 2 to 5 years
- 5 years or more

3- On average, how many hours per week do you spend on Social Media? *
- Less than 1 hour
- 1 to 2 hours
- 2 to 5 hours
- 5 to 10 hours
- More than 10 hours
4 - For what reasons do you use Social Media? *
(you can provide more than one answer)
- To keep in touch with people
- To share your interests (pictures, musics, videos...)
- To listen music and watch videos
- To exchange documents/files
- To find information about products/services/brands
- To meet new people
- Other: [ ]

5 - On which devices do you use Social Media? *
(you can provide more than one answer)
- Computer
- Tablet Computer (e.g. iPad, ...)
- Smartphone
- Other: [ ]

6 - Do you follow ('like') brands on Social Media? *
(If no, please directly go to question 10)
- Yes
- No

7 - For what reasons do you follow ('like') brands?
(you can provide more than one answer)
- To read comments and reviews about products/services
- To get discount or free products
- You are a current customer
- To communicate with brands
- To get updates about products/services
- Friends are fans of brands
- Other: [ ]

8 - If you follow a brand on Social Media, are you more likely to recommend to a friend?
- Yes, depends on the brand
- Yes, for many brands
- No
- I don't know

9 - If one of your friends follows a brand on Social Media, are you more likely to follow this brand?
- Yes, depends on the brand
- Yes, for many brands
- No
- I don't know
10 - Which information channels have the biggest influence on you? *
(you can provide more than one answer)

- [ ] TV ads
- [ ] Radio ads
- [ ] Internet ads (not on Social Media)
- [ ] Social Media
- [ ] Magazine ads
- [ ] Newspaper ads
- [ ] Posters

11 - Do you think that seeing friends talking or displaying pictures about a product/service on Social Media can make you realize that you would like to buy this product/service? *

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree

12 - For what kind of products/services do you think that you could realize that you want to buy a product/service because of your friends' activities on Social Media? *
(you can provide more than one answer)

- [ ] Clothes
- [ ] Electronics
- [ ] Household appliance
- [ ] Travel
- [ ] Entertainment (movies, music, concert,...)
- [ ] Cars
- [ ] Health and Beauty products
- [ ] Other: [ ]

13 - Are you more likely to buy a product/service after following a brand on Social Media? *

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

14 - When you want to find information about products/services/brands, do you use Social Media’s websites or tools? *

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
15 - For what kind of purchases do you use Social Media to search for information?
(you can provide more than one answer)
- Clothes
- Electronics
- Household appliance
- Travel
- Entertainment (movies, music, concert, ...)
- Cars
- Health and Beauty products
- Other: ____________

16 - Which Social Media do you use to obtain information about products/service/brands?
(you can provide more than one answer)
- Reviews Site (Opinions.com, TripAdvisor, ...)
- Social Network (Facebook, LinkedIn, ...)
- Multimedia sharing (YouTube, Dailymotion, ...)
- Microblogging (Twitter, ...)
- Blogs
- Forums
- Other: ____________

17 - Do you use Social Media to compare products/services/brands? *
- Yes
- No

18 - Do you seek your friends' opinions on Social Media before making your purchase decision? *

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19 - Do you seek people you don't know's opinions on Social Media before making your purchase decision? *

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20 - When you hesitate between different products/services/brands, do you ask your friends' opinion on Social Media? *

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21 - When you hesitate between different products/services/brands, do you ask people you don't know's opinion on Social Media? *

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22 - Do you trust your friends' reviews and comments about products/services/brands on Social Media? *

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23 - Do you trust reviews and comments from people you don't know on Social Media about products/services/brands on Social Media? *

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24 - Do you think that positive reviews and comments from friends about products/services/brands on Social Media can push you to make your purchase decision? *

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<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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25 - Do you think that positive reviews and comments from people you don't know about products/services/brands on Social Media can push you to make your purchase decision? *

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26 - Do you think that negative reviews and comments from friends about products/services/brands on Social Media can dissuade you to make your purchase decision? *

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27 - Do you think that negative reviews and comments from people you don’t know about products/services/brands on Social Media can dissuade you to make your purchase decision? *

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28 - How often do you purchase products/services after reading positive reviews on Social Media? *

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29 - How often do you purchase products/services after reading negative reviews on Social Media? *

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30 - Do you think that Social Media is more influential than traditional media in your final purchase decision? *

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31 - Do you think that Social Media plays a role in your final decision to purchase? *

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<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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32 - After a purchase do you rate or write reviews on Social Media about products/services/brands? *

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33 - Do you share your opinions to your friends on Social Media about products/services/brands when you are satisfied of your purchase? *

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</table>
34 - Do you share your opinions to your friends on Social Media about products/services/brands when you are not satisfied of your purchase? *

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always

35 - Do you share your opinions (rate, review, talk) to people you don’t know on Social Media about products/services/brands when you are satisfied of your purchase? *

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always

36 - Do you share your opinions (rate, review, talk) to people you don’t know on Social Media about products/services/brands when you are not satisfied of your purchase? *

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Frequently  Always

37 - For what categories of products/services/brands do you share your opinions on Social Media?
(If you never share your opinions you can directly go to the next question)

☐ Clothes
☐ Electronics
☐ Household appliance
☐ Travel
☐ Entertainment (movies, music, concert,...)
☐ Cars
☐ Health and Beauty products
☐ Other: ________
Thank you for your time and co-operation!

38. Which category below includes your age: *
- 17 or younger
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 +

39. What is your gender: *
- Male
- Female

40. What is your nationality? *

41. What is your educational qualification? *
- Secondary school
- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate

Submit
# Appendix B. Nationalities of Respondents Table

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<tr>
<th>Nationalities</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
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<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
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<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Peruvian</td>
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*Table 2: Nationalities of Respondents*
Appendix C. Starbucks France Semi-Structured Interview transcript

Maïlys Morand
Community Manager
at Starbucks France

1- Does Starbucks France uses Social Media to communicate with consumers?

‘Yes we do. However, we are only using Facebook Brand page and we recently started to use YouTube. We consider that it is not yet relevant for us to go on Twitter, Instagram and others. You have to know that most of the Facebook Starbucks France community does not have a Starbucks nearby. They are fans because they know Starbucks from abroad or from Paris and they want to have one in theirs cities.

For what purpose do you use Social Media at Starbucks France?

‘We use Facebook to inform fans about the new products (almost every month), to interact with them on our current products, coffee in general, sometimes news topics. Having this interaction with our customers help us to get feedbacks that will help us to provide the best quality to our customers.

Pushing more global contents that interest most of the community is a challenge for us, because as I just said, the majority of the fans do not have a Starbucks store close to their places.

We use YouTube to bring a more interactive content, push messages on our standards (Name on Cups) or possibilities into stores (Frappuccino personalization), and get closer to the
community with our 4 Frappuccino videos which shows a Baristas talking directly to customers.’

2- **Do you think that providing a good interaction experience (with your brand) to customers through Social Media can influence their purchase decision?**

‘If customers have a good “experience” online, they feel understood and listened by the brand then they will be more likely to go into our stores. However, it does not mean that they will go especially into stores only because we had good interaction. We need to push special content such as new innovative and/or unusual product to get them to move there. I am currently talking about the 5% of the fans community that really interacts with us and have a store in their cities. On the contrary, if fans or followers have a bad experience it is going to be worst: first they will avoid our stores and second they will tell their friends and the other social users to avoid us’.

3- **On my research, consumers said that Social Media is the second channel that has the biggest influence on them after TV ads.**

**Do you think that a brand should engage with consumers by using Social Media?**

Every brand can take advantage of Social Media, no matter the size of the company. People are looking for direct relation/interaction with brands. It is a not insignificant opportunity for brands to show to their customers that they care about them, to make them feel that they are privileged and recognized as loyal customers.
How is it done at Starbucks France?

‘To engage our fans, we have first determined who they are and what they want. When someone likes a brand it is to show his/her interest to the brand but also, as I said before, to be treated as a “special” customer. Engagement goes through:

1- Include them in our development; take part of our development by games. For example, I have developed a special game on social media linked to the website: create your own Frappuccino recipe and we will sell it for a short period of time in all our stores. It engaged the fans and showed them that we care about their taste and desire.

2- Rewards, special, unique information on services or products a brand gives in advance to its customers. That will make them feel unique and privileged.’

Do you think that companies should abandon the traditional media to only focus on Social Media?

‘I believe that a company should keep the two. One can help the other. A company can invest more on one or the other depending on its target and, of course, its products/services. If the majority of their customers are on the social media, then it makes sense to invest more on this media. As said, a company can link the two media by, for example, adding QR Code on their promotional leaflet to drive prospects to their Facebook pages or a special application. Giving that not everyone is on a social media, even though it is a strong trend, a “physical” company has to keep its communication on all its media channels.’
4- Do you think that companies should allow consumers to share their opinions on the company’s Social Media page?

‘Of course! It is the matter of social media: interaction between customers and a brand but it also gives them a platform where they can talk and share information with the other members of the community.

Most of respondents in my research said that negative reviews from friends and from people they don’t know could dissuade them to make their purchase decision. What does Starbucks France do in case of negative comments?

We first try to understand why this person had a bad experience in our store by answering to his/her comments. If a company does not want its bad comments to spread all over the social media and gain more intensity, then, they have to react quickly and never let a bad comment without answer more than 12 hours on line. In most cases, we direct the person to the customer service to be compensated if his bad experience is in relation with an employee, with the cleanliness of the stores or a product. In any case, we answer that we have taken into account his/her comments and that we will try to improve/resolve… the subject which matters.

5- Most of respondents said that positive reviews and comments about products/services/brands on Social Media could push them to make their purchase decision

Do you think that companies should reward customers that post positive reviews?

‘Not really reward each good comment but say thanks at least. The good comments are generally made by the “influencers” of the community then, it depends on the loyalty/reward
program of the company, we can send a targeted reward to them for special/new product launch or any special events.’

**Does Starbucks France do it?**

‘Not yet because it is difficult to recognize the “influencers” within our community but, it does make sense to do it for us then it has to be implemented as soon as possible.’

**6- A lot of respondents in my research said that they follow brands on Social Media to get updates about products/services.**

**Do you think that companies/brands should use Social Media to communicate about their products/services updates? And why?**

‘Fans/followers expect, as you said, to be updated on new products then, obviously, yes companies have to speak about their products updates (if it is a real update and it brings an advantage for customers).’

**Does Starbucks France do it?**

‘We communicate on our new products and upgraded standards.’

**Does Starbucks France use Social Media to launch marketing campaigns? If yes can you tell me more about what your company did?**

‘We are launching new campaigns every 2 months (approximately). Then we are creating small buzz on the new products few days before their launch (with guest games for example)
and we communicate on them during the campaign regularly but using different type of posts. Every campaign has a kind of “theme”, we adapt the message, we communicate, we use in stores to the Digital through our website and the social media content/communication (only relevant messages for Digital).’

7- Do you think that companies should use Social Media to build loyalty with customers?

Does Starbucks France do it?

‘Companies should use Social Media to build loyalty but we have not done it yet at Starbucks as the majority of our social community is far from our stores. However, companies can use the geo-localized pages (one for each store) to push information (such as promotion/ loyalty rewards) to people who located themselves there several times (in other terms people who are loyal or at least come very often). Moreover, if you have a loyalty card, you can push information on it and remind the community on the rewards they can get if they come more often.’

8- My research has shown that consumers are more or less influenced by Social Media according to their nationality (for example, people in North-America share more about their customer experiences, post pictures of their purchases etc). Do you think that companies should take the cultural dimension into account?

‘Yes they have to!’

Does Starbucks France do it? And how do you do it?

‘We are trying to. We are mostly talking to French and, as you know, they are not the most active people on social media in the world. Then we try to push them to share pictures of them
with our products through games (with rewards) or just a “gentle” competition between friends but without rewards do not expect too high results. However, as a company it is very difficult, long or even impossible to change people habits so we have to adapt our campaign to what they are expecting in terms of “amusements”. French are more willing to play a game than to share a picture on social media. If you succeed to determine exactly what your customers/community like to do on the social media, how they spend and enjoying their time there, then it is the jackpot!”
Appendix D. Novotel Semi-Structured Interview transcript

Damien Jacques
Community Manager
at Novotel Daegu City Center (South Korea)

1- Does Novotel uses Social Media to communicate with consumers?

‘ACCOR Group uses Social Media platforms and tools for different purposes. We use Facebook and Twitter for our branding image and to engage with consumers directly online. The Human Resources department of the group use LinkedIn.

Concerning individual hotels such as Novotel Daegu City Center we use Facebook and Twitter for our brand image but also to set up and communicate about events we hold at the hotel. In combination we also use Foursquare to offer discounts. We try to adapt to the specificity of the countries the hotels are by also using the “local” Social Network in use in these countries’.

2- Do you think that providing a good interaction experience (with your brand) to customers through Social Media can influence their purchase decision?

‘Yes we do believe that providing a good experience to our customer plays a role in their consumption. At Novotel Daegu we use Foursquare that allow us to offer ‘special discounts’ to our customers. We realised that using this Social Media tool could drive more business. If
the community is active we create ‘event’ on Facebook to invite people to concerts held at the hotel and to bar promotion. Having a connection with the users through Social Media help us to establish a very long-term relationship that can lead to cross sell such as rooms, weddings organizations…’

3- On my research, consumers said that Social Media is the second channel that has the biggest influence on them after TV ads.

Do you think that a brand should engage with consumers by using Social Media?

‘Yes and even more than with T.V. T.V is now considered as a “dead” channel since it doesn’t offer any interactions between marketers who push the messages and consumers that receive it. With T.V, the target is very passive and has a very little interest in what is going on.

How is it done at Novotel?

‘At Novotel Daegu City Center we engage with consumers by organizing events and by providing social activity. We organise concerts and offer special discount only for the first 100 comments…

We also invite our customers to review the services offered by the hotel. We ask them some questions such as “tell us what you think”, “did you ever do this in our hotel?” We also organise photo contest…

We believe that it is paramount to create an interaction with our customers and to be proactive by asking questions about the future. Such questions can be for example “what is the hotel of
the future for you?” or “tell us what you would change in our next product” and so on. This helps us to know what is the demands of our customers and we could thus try to anticipate for the future.’

Do you think that companies should abandon the traditional media to only focus on Social Media?

‘No, it would be a huge mistake for companies to abandon the traditional media in favour of Social Media. Marketers need to remember that most of ‘older’ people don’t use a computer correctly and or not “Social Media” oriented as is the generation Y. Moreover some media cannot be replaced such as banner, board and so on. Be present and focused on all different type of media is the best way to know what people think, what will be the next media evolution and so on. Of course it has to be link with Individual Media Strategy.’

4- Do you think that companies should allow consumers to share their opinions on the company’s Social Media page?

‘Yes. Allowing our consumers to share their opinions on our Social Media’s page help us to increase our product quality, communication and bounds between users and company. I think that bad comments are only bad if you don’t handle them correctly’.
Most of respondents in my research said that negative reviews from friends and from people they don’t know could dissuade them to make their purchase decision. What does Novotel do in case of negative comments?

‘In case of negative comments we always reply politely and we explain why it went wrong. If the complain is due to a mistake from our side we offer discounts to consumers who complained in order to make them coming back. This gives us a chance to offer a better experience next time. If the second experience is good, most of consumers will mention that they have been impressed by the fact that we really cared about their opinions and will say that their first bad comment was not completely right’.

5- Most of respondents said that positive reviews and comments about products/services/brands on Social Media could push them to make their purchase decision.

Do you think that companies should reward customers that post positive reviews?

‘No, this would be a big mistake. The whole system is working because of trust. Give rewards to increase positive reviews and you will destroy the trust. Also paying for having good reviews is the best way to hide product weaknesses. If people have incentive to write good things about you, you will never know what is going wrong and you won’t be able to correct it.’

Does Novotel do it?

‘No we don’t do it at Novotel because we don’t want to break the trust. Moreover we have confidence in our product so we certainly don’t ask people to write good reviews about us.’
6- A lot of respondents in my research said that they follow brands on Social Media to get updates about products/services.

Do you think that companies/brands should use Social Media to communicate about their products/services updates? And why?

‘Yes because this what consumers expect from companies’

Does Novotel use Social Media to launch marketing campaigns? If yes can you tell me more about what your company did?

‘We have launched several Social Media campaign from ACCOR to Novotel Daegu City Center. These campaigns concerned discount for the first 100 comments to special Social Media card.’

7- Do you think that companies should use Social Media to build loyalty with customers?

‘Yes, companies should seize the opportunity of interactions offer by Social Media to build loyalty with their customers’.

Does Novotel do it? If yes, how do you do it? What actions have you done?

‘We created a Social Media card that allow to collect points as rewards. We also use Foursquare Special and we organise monthly event such as ‘Christmas in August’ and we ask our customers to rate us on Facebook.’
8- My research indicated that consumers are more or less influenced by Social Media according to their nationality. Do you think that companies should take the cultural dimension into account?

**Does Novotel do it?**

‘Yes and no. Yes because Social Media are ‘Social’ like their names say. So it means that we need to adapt to societal and cultural dimensions. However, you have to keep in mind that the first objective of companies is to sell. So if adaptation has to be done, marketers need to bear in mind that the adaptation should be done only in a purpose to reach sales objectives, nothing more is needed (nor recommended)’.
Appendix E. The Conversation Prism – Solis & JESS3

Figure 83: The Conversation Prism by Brian Solis and Jesse Thomas

The Conversation Prism debuted in August 2008 to provide a visual representation of the true expansiveness of the Social Web and the conversations that define it. In this short time span, over one million people have crossed its path.

When Jesse Thomas of JESS3 and I initially mapped “the conversation,” we recognized that the act of categorizing social networks within a visually rich graphic would be momentary at
best, demanding endless iterations in order to accurately document evolving and shifting online conversations as well as the communities that promote them.

My goal was to observe, analyze, dissect, and present the dynamics of conversations, how and where they transpired.

We’re proud to introduce version 2.0 of The Conversation Prism. We’re also excited to release a version that traverses the online realm into the real world with the release of a full color 18” x 24” poster to prominently display in the workplace, classroom, home office, or at events. Please visit www.theconversationprism.com for details, embed codes, and additional insights.

What follows is a detailed mission statement and instructional guide to help you successfully endeavor into the social world of online communication and relationships building.

The Eloquence of the Conversation Prism and Social Science

The inspiration for its inception derived from a consistent observation of top-down methodologies and practices of brands, professional and personal, employed to create a presence on the social Web. Simply stated, brands focused on building presences in the most popular communities without regard to how they would attract inhabitants and ultimately interact, let alone whether or not their core ambassadors were present.

The Conversation Prism suggested a reversal in this approach, instead inspiring a bottom-up strategy that promoted social research, mapping, and ethnography. This inceptive sociological fieldwork would change everything and provide the insight necessary to develop an enlightened and cultured Social Media program that could potentially humanize the brand and foster relationships and engender emissaries to carry goodwill across the social web.

You + Me + Mutual Value = <3
People aren’t lured into relationships simply because you cast the bait to reel them into a conversation.

Sincerity extends beyond the mere act of creating a profile on Twitter or forming a fan page on Facebook or a group on LinkedIn. The dual definition of transparency serves very different forms of both genuine and hollow separated by intent and impression. Relationships are measured in the value, action, and sentiment that others take away from each conversation. Talking “at” or responding without merit, intelligence, or quality grossly underestimates the people you’re hoping to befriend and influence.

If participation were this simple, then perhaps everyone would excel as a Social Media “expert.”

It’s the difference between community and a halfway house; one will flourish, while the other will shelter transients, never building a thriving citizenry.

Identifying connected communities and observing the themes and culture of each provide entrée into the personification necessary to foster a genuine and equal ecosystem for dialogue.

It’s about bringing information and solutions to people where they congregate before attempting to host their attention on our terms.

The art of conversations is mastered through both the practice of hearing AND listening.

I hear you.

I’m listening to you.

I understand.
Drink it in… identify opportunities to engage, but more importantly, experience the nature, dynamic, ambience, and emotion in order to sincerely and intelligently empathize and converse as a peer.

Conversation Workflow

Making connections at the human level with the intent to listen before action is the only true and rewarding source of mutually beneficial engagement.

Socialized media is empowering us to not only consume content, but also create it. This is the era of new influencers and we become media and earn authority based on the content we share and also how and where we participate. In turn, our social graph creates an orbiting realm of social influence that can be useful to brands that align with our values and lifestyle.

This is about humanizing the story in a way that empathizes with those whom you’re trying to compel.

Conversations are increasingly distributed. This social distribution fragments our ability to connect with masses, but promotes a 1:1 approach that yields a one-to-many upside through the empowerment of influential social beacons.

The Conversation Prism represents that opportunity to proactively survey the landscape to pinpoint relevant dialogue, prioritize participation strategies, and create an engagement hierarchy and org chart.

V2.0 introduces a workflow rotation of concentric circles that assist in the establishment of value-added engagement cadence.

Level One, The Hub:
As a communications or service professional, you’ll find yourself at the center of the prism – whether you’re observing, listening or participating.

Halo 1:

The next layer of circles is supported by the activity of learning and organizing engagement strategies…

1. Observation – Discovering the communities that are actively discussing your brand

2. Listening – Hearing the people and the underlying sentiment in order to accurately craft response and participation programs, by community.

3. Identification – Recognizing and acknowledging the beacons to potentially enlist as brand ambassadors as well as the consumer who simply needs your response.

4. Internalization – Not every bit of feedback will be beneficial to your organization, but you will recognize patterns or spots of brilliance that can improve existing products and services over time.

5. Prioritization – Assess and structure where and how your team should focus.


Halo 2:

Social Media represents the intersection of all public facing departments and requires that each infrastructure employ a socialized series of guidelines and response strategies. Inward focus now must include outward contribution. Ideally, each organization will appoint a community manager to listen and also assign and manage the responses of each department. Over time, this process will seamlessly integrate within the company’s CRM infrastructure, creating a new class of Social CRM or sCRM.
Conversations should always map to specific authorities within an organization to provide a competent and helpful response.

1. Customer or Product Support

2. Product and Sales

3. Marketing/PR

4. Community

5. Corporate Communications

6. Crisis

7. Support

Halo 3:

The outer ring completes the image of conversational workflow, but not the cycle. The process is powered by the continual rotation of listening, responding, and learning online and in the real world.

1. Ongoing Feedback and Insight – This is a necessary ingredient in more effectively building a socially aware and trusted brand. We must learn and demonstrate growth based on the feedback we receive. We must also continually share knowledge, provide resources, and communicate vision to earn trust, authority, and respect.

2. Participation – It’s been said that participation is the new marketing. Perhaps it’s better said that participation is the new focus group and mechanism for embracing humility to genuinely humanize your story. It’s how we learn and improve.
3. Online – Effectively building online relationships increase brand visibility and strengthen brand value within respective Social Networks. Embracing and empowering the community carries our brand personality across social graphs.

4. Real World – The true metric for relationships is how well they carry from the Web to the real world. It’s not about reaching customers using the latest shiny new object, it’s about reaching customers where they go to discover and share information and building relationships that have meaning and worth online and offline.

Creating a Social Map

As conversations are increasingly distributed, everything begins with listening and observing. Doing so will help you identify exactly where relevant discussions are taking place, as well as their scale and frequency. This dialog can be charted into a targeted social map that’s unique to your brand. In the example below, I created a Social Map using MindJet to represent the communities where (if I were a brand) either need to or currently contribute based on my initial research.

Source: http://www.briansolis.com/2009/03/conversation-prism-v20/
Appendix F. The Consumer Decision Journey - McKinsey

How consumers make decisions

Every day, people form impressions of brands from touch points such as advertisements, news reports, conversations with family and friends, and product experiences. Unless consumers are actively shopping, much of that exposure appears wasted. But what happens when something triggers the impulse to buy? Those accumulated impressions then become crucial because they shape the initial consideration set: the small number of brands consumers regard at the outset as potential purchasing options.

The funnel analogy suggests that consumers systematically narrow the initial-consideration set as they weigh options, make decisions, and buy products. Then, the postsale phase becomes a trial period determining consumer loyalty to brands and the likelihood of buying their products again. Marketers have been taught to “push” marketing toward consumers at each stage of the funnel process to influence their behavior. But our qualitative and quantitative research in the automobile, skin care, insurance, consumer electronics, and mobile telecom industries shows that something quite different now occurs.

Actually, the decision-making process is a more circular journey, with four primary phases representing potential battlegrounds where marketers can win or lose: initial consideration; active evaluation, or the process of researching potential purchases; closure, when consumers buy brands; and postpurchase, when consumers experience them (Exhibit 2). The funnel metaphor does help a good deal—for example, by providing a way to understand the strength of a brand compared with its competitors at different stages, highlighting the bottlenecks that stall adoption, and making it possible to focus on different aspects of the marketing challenge. Nonetheless, we found that in three areas profound changes in the way consumers make buying decisions called for a new approach.
Figure 84: The Consumer Decision Journey – McKinsey