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Noémie Meslat

# IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CUSTOMERS' PURCHASE DECISION

–Case: Chocolaterie Thibaut, *France*

**TURKU AMK**
TURKU UNIVERSITY OF
APPLIED SCIENCES

Noémie Meslat

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Due to the digital revolution, people are more and more connected to each other, which make access to information easier. It has also changed the way people consume. Craft companies in the French market of food industry are numerous, as food is part of local culture. However, even if this industry sector is promising, small and individual companies do not have the necessary resources to invest in order to advertise in proper traditional way. Therefore, digital marketing has become a remarkable asset for such companies as it is low cost advertisement.

This thesis studies the way small companies could use social media platforms in order to influence customers' purchase decision to provide guidance for the case study company, *Chocolaterie Thibaut, France.* During this research, mixed method was applied using both questionnaire and interview design by the author to collect data.

During this process, the author underline that the company seems to reach its customers' expectations by offering high quality products. According to the population sample, 51% of the company's customers are female over 50 years old. This result might be the reason why 60% of customers were not aware of the company's Facebook page.

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# 1  INTRODUCTION

New technology is growing very fast and digital business already plays an important role in many developed countries such as France. In the past few years, new technology development has enabled people to interact with each other in a virtual environment and has completely changed the use of the web service. According to O'Reilly (2009), Web 2.0 is "a new label for web technologies and consumer behaviors to facilitate user participation and interaction on the web". Thanks to social media platforms, people are more and more connected, taking down the geographical barrier, which primarily divided individuals.

According to the Cambridge dictionary (2017), social media can be defined as websites or applications, which allow users to participate in social networking by creating or sharing content. According to this definition, social media includes networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube, for the most known. However, it also includes blogging sites, emails, chat rooms and forums. Previous researches from Statista, published in "Social Media usage worldwide" (2018)  show that 56% of French population was using at least one social media networking platform in 2017. Moreover , 87% of people under 40 years are active on social media. (Statista 2018)

Social media is not only used to catch up with people or engage chat with friends and family anymore. In the past few years, it also became a place where people, government and organizations can interact with each other. The growth of social media has not changed the purchase decision process of customers itself. However, it has completely changed the purchasing pattern. For example, it has empowered the word of mouth by becoming a place where customers can make recommendations and evaluate the products. How Social Are Social Media? (2017), a study from Cambridge University prove that customers believe other people's opinion when they post it on social media. It means that customers' behaviors are not only influenced by friends and family anymore, but also by unknown people on social media. Therefore, it is an opportunity for companies to create brand visibility

and make their customers become brand advocates. Brand advocates are committed customers with strong convictions about the given brand, whereas influencers show less passion for the brand. Brand advocates and influencers are different and should not be mingled.

Human being is born to live in a society. People need to be member of a group in order to develop themselves. To be integrated in a group or a society, individuals need to correspond to the society (or group) criteria. In order to answer positively to social criteria, individuals have to abide by social influence. There exist three different mode of social influence: identification , compliance and internalization (Kelman 1958).

In order to understand the different social influences and their importance, it is essential to complete this thesis. Indeed social media network is a tool that enables people to edit and share content. Therefore, social network is a platform on which people openly claim what they think and what they believe in. Social influence is the reason why people are responsive to online review and online customers' opinion. By expanding the society border, social media networks also expand the impact and importance of social influence on individuals.

There is a lot of previous research about how social media platforms can be used to influence purchase decision. A lot of information can be found online; thus, it is important to always check the sources. Most of available sources are recent and dated from less than four years ago. All basic principles about purchase decision process and marketing are available in books written by known and reliable authors such as Kotler and Keller (2012).

During this research, the objectives consist of exploring the current use of social media platforms in France and underline the impact of social media on customers' purchase decision. By using the findings, it is possible to identify the current habits in purchase decisions making and the tools that are used in order to drive prospects into a purchase decision. The main objective of this research is to understand and measure the value of this new marketing tool for the company case, Chocolaterie Thibaut, by discovering its impact on customers' purchase decision. The goal is to

provide suggestions to the chocolate factory about how to use this new marketing tool more efficiently.

This thesis aim to answer the following questions:

> *How can small companies can use social media to influence customers behaviour, and most particularly their purchase decision?*

Based on the analysis of influencing factors of customers behaviour the author will try to find:

> *How could the company "Chocolaterie Thibaut" use more efficiently social media as a marketing tool?*

France is currently experiencing the major transfer of economic activity since the Second World War. Indeed according to the "Institut Supérieur des Métiers" and the "Direction Général des Entreprises" in February 2016, more than one third of French companies belong to the craft sector. These two governmental institutions claim an increase of 45% in the creation of craft companies. In the food sector, more than 75% of craft companies are small and medium sized companies. A large majority of those companies do not have the necessary means in order to launch marketing campaign. Therefore, the author believes this is important to develop marketing tools that are accessible to every company no matter their size.

As a student specialized in Marketing, the writer made an internship last year in a marketing agency specialized in social media. knowing almost nothing about social media advertising before this internship. During the six months internship in this agency, the author realized how social media advertising is a growing business. More and more companies use social media network as a new advertising platform. However, most of them do not know how to use this tool efficiently, especially small and medium companies.

In order to achieve this thesis, the author worked in collaboration with a French company called Chocolaterie Thiebaut. This company is a small family-owned chocolate factory. It was created by Denis Thibaut in 1991 in a small town of Champagne, France. At first, there were only two employees including the founder.

The small chocolate factory quickly became successful and grew up over the years. Nowadays, the company employs five people and have two extra apprentices in part time.

The company's short term objectives are offer loyalty to more customers and develop its touristic activity. Long terms objectives are to improve its equipment and modernise its fabrication process. The company is also willing to develop its activity with other companies in B2B market

The feature of this company is that every product is handmade. The factory possesses a total of three machines which are only used to keep the chocolate liquid or packed the "Cork". The "Cork" is the flagship product of the company. These are chocolate shaped as cork of Champagne bottle and filled with regional alcohol. Picture 2 illustrates some of them. As every chocolate is handmade, the company also offer personalized services such as unique chocolate's shape creations or even a 3D portrait fully made with chocolate. Picture 3 illustrates one of the employee's creation. This creation was presented in a regional creativity contest, which theme was "The Far West".

Picture 1: Chocolate factory's Front shop   Credit: V. Thibaut

Picture 2: "Champagne Corks"  Credit: V. Thibaut

Picture 3: Best production on regional creativity contest
Credit: Quentin P. and Jordan M.

# 2. SOCIAL MEDIA AS NEW MARKETING TOOL

During the last decade, many developed countries have faced a rapid growth of digitalisation. With the creation of social media platforms, people are easier and faster connected to each other. In order to increase brand and product awareness, companies need to take advantage of this connectivity.

## 2.1 Social Media as new community creators

In the Cambridge dictionary, the basic definition of social media refers to all websites and application that enables people to create and/or share content and that give the opportunity to participate in social networking. However, this definition can describe all websites found on the internet nowadays. Therefore, some people have a more restricted definition of social medial and consider it as the same as social

networking. Some people do not even consider blogs as part of social media. This divergence of opinions can quickly get confusing.

In order to find a clear definition of social media each word can be looked at in detail. First, "social" means interacting with others in the purpose of sharing information with them. Then, "Media" refers to communication tools. That in turn means that the internet is a form of media, but also newspapers, TV, radio and so on. Considering these two definitions, social media can be defined as all web-based communication tools that allow users to interact with others in order to share and receive information. Traditional media such as TV and newspapers are not considered as part of social media. However, the border between social media and traditional media starts to be more and more blurred as social media continues to evolve.

What is then the difference between social media and social networking? As mentioned above some people define social media the same as social networking. However, there is a slight difference between these two terms. In fact, social network is a part of social media. In order to make it clearer, The author sees social media as referencing to the fact that people share content (such as photos, videos, music, opinion and so on…) with other people. Whereas social network is focusing on who you are share this information with and the relationship you have with your audience.

## 2.2. The expansion of social media

According to The Digital Report made by "We are social" and "Hootsuite" (January 2018), there were more than one million new users in the top social platform every day. In total, there are more than three billion active social media users in the world, which represents 42% of the world's population and an increase of 13% compared to last year. This high numbers are even more impressive when we realize it only started a couple of decades ago. (We are social and Hootsuite 2018)

The first social media platform was created in 1997 under the name "Six Degrees". It was named after a theory called "six degrees of separation". This platform enabled

users to communicate one with another through blogs and instant messaging. However, at the time not everyone had an easy access to the internet and it was not common for people to socially engage online. Six Degrees ended in 2001.

In the early 2000's, more and more people started to use instant messaging in order to make friends, engage discussions with them and even dating people. Social media became more popular thanks to the creation of MySpace and Linkedin in 2003. One year later, Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook but only as private social media for Cambridge University. When he realized Facebook was a success, he decided to release the website to the public and gave the entire world access to his service. Another surge in social media came in 2010, when dozens of other websites also provided social media services.

In 2017, Statista published a report which shows that the highest penetration rate of social media services was among 18-24 years old. Indeed, 94% of respondents of this age group declared using social media services. However, 82% of those aged from 25 to 39 years old also reported the use of social media services. In total, it appears that 56% of French population was using social media platforms. (Statista 2018)

According to the new digital report from 2018, more than four billion of people are nowadays using Internet. This report also shows that people are spending more and more time using the internet. Indeed, users spend in average around 6 hours per day (which means one quarter of their time) online. (Satista 2018)

Social media is more and more accessible because of affordable smartphones and smart devices. Moreover, mobile data plan that are sometime almost unlimited allows people to enjoy the internet wherever they are. There exist thousands of social media platforms, each one catering a different type of user. The world's top five social media platform, according to The Digital Report (2018), is: Facebook (2.061 billion users), Youtube (1.5B), WhatsApp (1.3B), WeChat (963M) and QQ (850M). In France, the most used platforms are: Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. (Statista 2018)

## 2.3 Social Media Marketing as a new marketing tool

Marketing as part of business model is used in order to attract customers, satisfy them and keep them loyal to a brand. The concept of marketing is related to the management and the study of relationship between a brand, its prospects and its current customers. However it appears that marketing does not have a clear definition. Other people define it as a process, others as a concept.

First of all, the original terms refer going to the markets in the purpose of selling goods. Based on this primary meaning, American Marketing Association (2013) define marketing as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." Kotler in 2006 also considers marketing as a process and defines it as a process of exchange, the purpose of which is to satisfy people's needs and wants. Theoreticians  such as Kotler and Keller who consider marketing as a process all define it as a long process, which includes market research, targeting and segmentation, elaboration of strategies regarding pricing, promotion and distribution, developing communication and development of long-term goals. However, these steps are always evolving as the market environment changes through the years.

As mentioned above, marketing has not always been seen a process. Adam Smith (1776) is the first one who define marketing as a concept, whose purpose is to anticipate the needs and wants of customers in order to satisfy them better than competitors. However, whether considered as a process or as a concept, both theories agree on the fact that marketing is directly linked to customers' satisfaction and to identify their needs and wants. Therefore, the author would like to underline the difference between needs and wants. Needs are  related to something that is necessary for people's survival (Cambridge dictionary 2017). A need that is not satisfied can lead to serious issues such as dysfunction of death. For example, water and food are human's needs. On the other hand, wants are related to something desired or that people aspired to. Unlike needs, wants are not essential for life

(Cambridge dictionary 2017). They are often the result of a culture and/or a social group membership.

If the definition of marketing is a somewhat vague, it is because marketing is in constant evolution and re-invention. In fact, a society changes over the years and marketing needs to adapt itself to people's requirements. Therefore, marketing, which was at first considered as a creative branch, is nowadays considered as a science, which requires studies and market research. As marketing evolves in time, it expands in order to create different types of marketing. Digital marketing is one of them. With more than four billion people connected, online for six hours each per day in average (Statista 2018), digital has become an important part of our lives. Indeed, this connectivity is used for chatting with friends, tracking information etc. Therefore, brands have to be well integrated into this digital world in order to be recognized by their audiences.

Social media marketing is part of digital marketing. It refers to all tools and activity used on social media in order to increase brand awareness and start and manage conversations and exchanges insight one or several target group. Social media marketing was created with the emergence of the Web 2.0 and the increase of social media users. The aim of social media marketing is to share high valued content with the company's customers and prospects. The more valued is the message for the customer, the more s/he will share it back with his own network. According to this, social media marketing can be seen working as a giant word of mouth process. Social media marketing allows companies to integrate some existing community by starting conversations and listen directly their customers and prospects. However, more and more companies are using social media marketing as a marketing tool. For example, a study demonstrate that 80% of Fortune 500 companies were active on Facebook and Twitter in 2013 (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research 2014). Therefore, it become more and more difficult to stand out from competitors .

The reason why so many companies use social media marketing strategy is that there are many benefits. Indeed social media marketing allows companies to collect customers' experiences  through review chat and rating systems. It is also easier to

identify and reach influencers' groups and customers' communities, which can become brand ambassadors and contribute to the growth of its awareness. One more benefit, and maybe one of the most impacting ones, is that social media marketing costs are very low. Indeed is it one of the less expensive ways to do marketing, as most of social media channels are free of charge.

However, it is difficult to evaluate the rentable of marketing actions on social media. Everybody seems to know there are many benefits for a brand to be active on social media platforms but it is hard to translate these benefits into quantifiable features such as money (Figure 1).
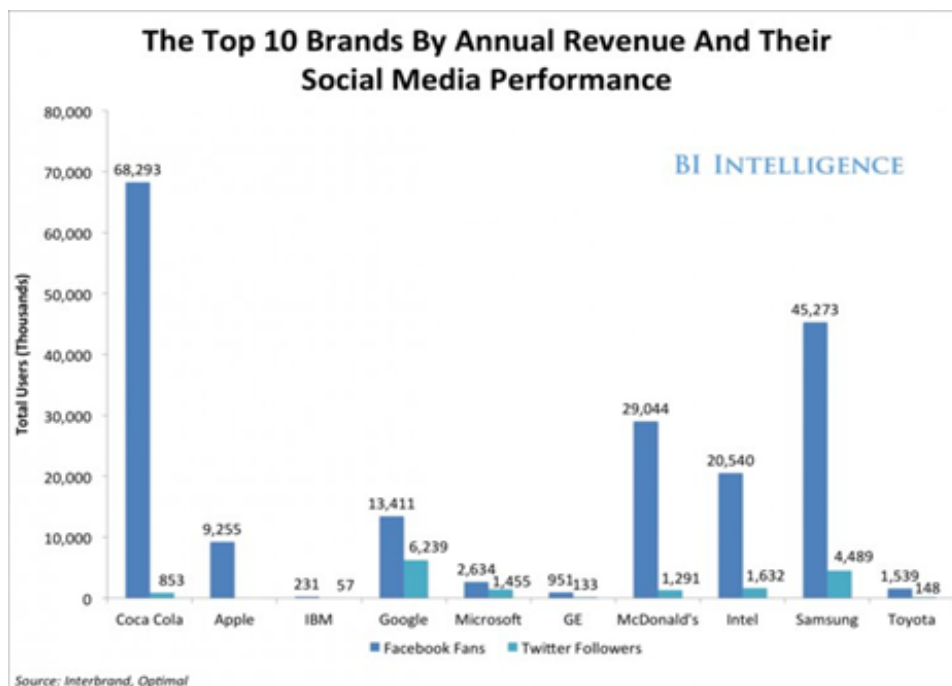


Figure 1: The top 10 brands by annual revenue and their social media performance Source : BI

BI Intelligence (2013) published a report in which they analyse the potential benefits for brands to work on social media platforms. It also shows on which channel the given brands are focusing their efforts. Figure 1 illustrates the comparison between brands' annual revenue and their social media performance. For example, Coca-Cola, which has the higher annual revenue, has 68,293,000 Facebook fans while only 853,000 Twitter followers. Google, which is has the fourth biggest annual revenue, has 13,411,000 Facebook fans. On the other hand, Samsung, which has a

lower annual revenue has 45,273,000 Facebook fans. This figure shows that there is no correlation between the annual revenue of a company and its social media performance.

In order to be known and recognized, a brand needs to reach a lot of customers and prospects. Being present where audiences spend their time and invest attention is the key point of a good communication strategy. As mentioned above, 42% of the world's population is active on social media platform and the average time spend on internet is six hours a day per person. Therefore, brands that are not visible on social media could miss a chance to engage and share with their customers, which can, in some cases, lead to competitor's advantage. However, brands have to be careful: social media marketing is not that simple. It needs to follow a well-planned strategy and the delivered message has to be clear.

## 2.4 Basic common mistakes in social media marketing

First of all, it is very important for a brand to use the right platforms. If social media marketing does not cost a lot of money, businesses still have to invest resources and time on it. Being on the wrong platforms means losing those investments and also failing to reach the brand's target. The most common mistake businesses often make is opening an account on every social media platforms they are aware of and then leave it inactive. Every marketer has a limited amount of time to spend for social media marketing, therefore it is better to carefully choose only a couple of platform you want to engage in and really focus on it.

> *"The truth is, it is better to not have a social media icon on your website if you are not going to actively engage it."* Matthew Hudson (2017)

It is important to understand that every platform is slightly different one from another. Therefore each has its own impact on marketing. According to previous research made by harmony digital in 2017, it appears that Pinterest is the social media website that is the best additional product information provider. It means people are more likely to trust addition product information that come from this platform rather

than another. Twitter is the best as product discovery tool and Facebook as product sale or purchase alert (Harmony digital 2017).

According to Harmony Digital (2017), the social media platform that most likely influence purchase is Facebook, closely followed by Youtube and LinkedIn. (Figure 2)
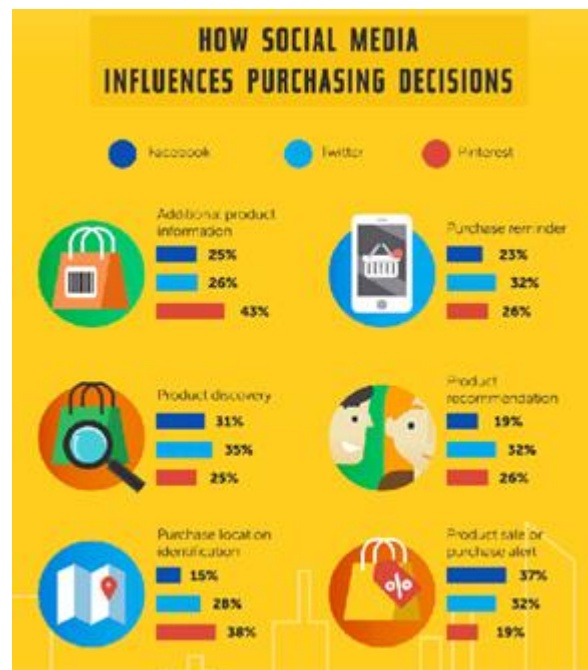


Figure 2: How social media influences purchasing decision Source: harmony digital 2017

Another mistake that companies often make is to talk about something that is important for them rather than engaging on something that matter for their customers (Matthew Hudson, 2017). Indeed, it is important to understand that social media marketing is more about sharing with customers rather than promote products as it is done in all marketplace. Social media marketing is about communicate with client and prospects in order to build an image to the brand and make customers and prospect feel close to the brand's value.

In order to feel close to a brand, customers also need to feel valued by the brand. One of the better way to make customers feel valued is to ask their opinion and listen to their remarks. This is way a company that only share content on social media platforms is only half efficient. Brands also have to starts conversation and answer to their comments and messages. Being active on social media is an everyday task and not only once in a while job.

# 3. CUSTOMER PURCHASE DECISION IN DIGITAL MARKETING

In order to influence customers' purchase decision, it is important to understand its features. In this chapter, the author will explain the different type of buying behaviors and discover influencing factors of purchase decision.

## 3.1 The four type of buying behaviors

According to Kardes (2011), customer behavior refers to "all activities associated with the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services". This also includes "the consumer's emotional, mental and behavioural responses that precede or follow these activities". Customer behavior can be influenced by four different factors, which are cultural, social, personal and psychological factors.

First of all, there exist several types of customer purchase decision behavior. Kotler (2005) has defined four different types of customer purchase decision behavior based on different levels of brand's distinction and customer's involvement. These four different types of customer purchase decision behavior are: complex buying behavior, variety-seeking buying behavior, dissonance-reduction buying behavior, habitual buying behavior. The figure 3 below helps to understand how they are displayed.

## Types of Buying Decision Behavior

### Four Types of Buying Behavior

|  | High involvement | Low involvement |
|---|---|---|
| **Significant** differences between brands | Complex buying behavior | Variety-seeking buying behavior |
| **Few** differences between brands | Dissonance-reducing buying behavior | Habitual buying behavior |

Figure 3: Four type of buying behaviors          Source: Pearson education, Inc. 2012

Complex buying behavior happens when customer is highly involved in the buying process. They take time to gather all information about the product's features and function. Brand image is also important for customer in complex buying behavior. This type of behavior often applies when customer wants to purchase a product with high value or for a long term usage, such as a car for example.

The second type of customer buying behavior is dissonance-reduction buying behavior. It is defined by high level of customer involvement but low brands differentiation. Customers are very attentive to the product's features, however they do not carefully compare similar products from different brands. This behavior can apply when customers are buying easily available products.

Variety-seeking buying behavior takes place when customer is less involved in purchase process. However, they are carefully considering differences between brands. This type of behavior usually apply for goods or services at low price. This type of behavior is difficult to manage for brands because customers won't hesitate to switch brands if they are not satisfy by the product or services they bought.

The final buying behavior here is called habitual buying behavior. This refers to the purchase of day to day goods or services. Customers are not particularly involved in the process and do not really pay attention to differences between brands.

In the case of the chocolate factory used in this thesis, customers' variety-seeking buying behavior is the one that occurs. Indeed, customer are usually not highly involved in the purchase process and do not carefully compare different brands. However, if not satisfy, they can easily switch brand.

According to Kelman (1958), customers purchase decision can be affected by three different mode of social influences:

The first is identification. It occurs when a person accepts to be influenced by someone because of its status insight of the group. For example, when an individual wants to integrate into a group of people, he or she accept the leader's argument without condition in order to be associated with him. Identification process can also occur when an individual admires another person, such as a pop idol, and wants be like him or her. In marketing, social icon are called influencers.

The second is compliance. In some cases, compliance can be similar to obedience without order. It occurs when somebody does what other people wants him or her to do, following a suggestion or a request. During compliance process, individuals change their public behavior but keep their private beliefs. Therefore, compliance process does not request emotional investment.

Last social influence is internalization. It is the deepest level of influence, which is usually made on a long-term basis. It occurs when individuals change the way they act in public and their private beliefs at the same time.

Due to the digitalisation and the existence of social media platforms, social behaviors have changed since Kelman's research. However, if the sources of social influence have changed, social influences itself remain accurate.

## 3.2 Influences of social media on decision making process

According to Olenski (2012), social media surely has impacts on sales, loyalty and brand awareness as the business world is more focus on serving and delighting customers. Due to the digitalisation, buying behaviors are not solely impacted by traditional channel but also extend to online platforms. This theory is enforce by a research that Google conducted in 2012 in  U.K, U.S, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Brazil. During this research, Google studied the customer journey of online purchase. The research shown that, in all targeted countries, social media help enforce brand awareness and consideration.

However, using social media marketing can be a risks vector. Indeed online marketers do not have full control on social media. Preferences and decision making also depend upon external parties through reviews, referrals and other user-generated content. (Constantinides and Fountain 2008). Customers are  more likely influenced by people they know due to the trust they feel for them.

The influence of online marketers-generated content can also be increased by experternal parties. Miller (2012) underline that more than one social media user over four claims being more likely to pay attention to ads that are shared by one of their social connection.

# 4. RESEARCH PROCESS AND DATA COLLECTION

The main objective of this research in to define how could the company "Chocolaterie Thibaut" use more efficiently social media as a marketing tool?

In this chapter, the author describes the research process, explains how data were collected and analysed and gives the results of the questionnaire and interview.

## 4.1 Description of the research process

In order to achieve her research, the author chose to use mixed research methods. The prevailing method is quantitative method, represented by a survey filled by the customers of the chocolate factory. Questionnaire was the most effective way to collect data from a large sample of population (the company's customers in this case). The main purpose of this questionnaire was to define a clear customer's profile of the chocolate factory. Therefore the questionnaire was specially made to fit this purpose.

The questionnaire consists of ten questions distributed into three different parts. Each part of this survey was linked to other parts but each one had its independent purpose. The first part of the survey contained socio-demographic questions such as gender, age and home location. However, all answers remain anonymous as people answer more likely to an anonymous questionnaire because they know they will not be judged and this will not have further consequences for them. The second part of the questionnaire contains questions designed in order to define customers' purchase experience and evaluate their satisfaction. The final part of the questionnaire will help the author to define the role of social media in customers' purchase decision. Questionnaire can be found in Appendix.

In addition to quantitative method, qualitative method was used according to the outcomes of the previous questionnaire. Qualitative method is represented by an

oral exchange between the author and several member of the chocolate factory. The purpose of this second method was to explore and establish strategies in order to improve the company's communication on social media. As qualitative method was applied orally, data were collected under notes and sentences, summarized and classified in order to guide the research.

## 4.2 Data collection of the questionnaire

The collection of customers' data though the questionnaire took three weeks, which means eighteen working days. The timescale for this questionnaire was carefully chosen by the author and under the approval of the company for several reasons. First of all, in order to collect a maximum response rate and have a sample of population as closed to the reality as possible, questionnaire needed to be launched during a period of high activity for the company. On the other hand, if the period of activity is too high, employees and customers are rushed and response rate will drop. Therefore, questionnaire was launched at the beginning of March, just after Valentine's day and a couple of weeks before Easter. Indeed for a chocolate factory, these two period are intense.

During these three weeks, the company asked all its customers to fill in the questionnaire. A large majority of customers' agreed to participate. In total, 101 questionnaires were answered. However, only 96 of them were taken into account for this research because five of them were only partially filled. It seems that only 96 answers are not enough to consider these results as relevant, however considering the very small size of the company and the period the questionnaire was launch, it can be considered that the sample of population is a reasonable representation of the reality.

In order to ensure all questions were understandable and leading to relevant answers, a pilot test was launched at first. The author asked the employees of the company to made 15 customers fill in the questionnaires and gather the feedback

from them. The results were that customers were happy to help the author and the company. Some of them felt like they wanted to add more details. Consequently, the author decided to add a space at the end of questionnaire, where customers could let personal comments.

All answers were analysed during the first week of April. As all questionnaires were filled on paper, the author had to classify all answer on an excel sheet. All results are then translated in percentages, which makes comparison between different data easier, and illustrated by diagrams, graphics and figures in order to make it clearer. After analysing questionnaires results, the author contacted the company in order to give them the results and set up an interview.

# 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS

## 5.1 Data analysis of the questionnaire

First question was to define the gender proportion of the population's sample. According to the data collected, 21.9% of respondents were males whereas 78.1% were females. It means more than three customers over four are females. It is interesting and very important to keep this information in mind because customers' gender can have influence on targeted audience.

The following questions aimed to define average age of the population's sample. It appears that 65.7% of respondents is more than 50 years old. If this information is crossed with the first question about respondents' gender, it appears that 51.0% of respondents is more than 50 years old females. The author can therefore declare

that the majority of the chocolate factory's customers are females aged of 50 and older. (see figure 4)

## AGE DIVISION OF THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY'S CUSTOMERS BASED ON POPULATION SAMPLE (IN PERCENTAGE)

≡ < 20   ≡ 20 < 30   ≡ 30 < 40   ≡ 40 < 50   ≡ > 50
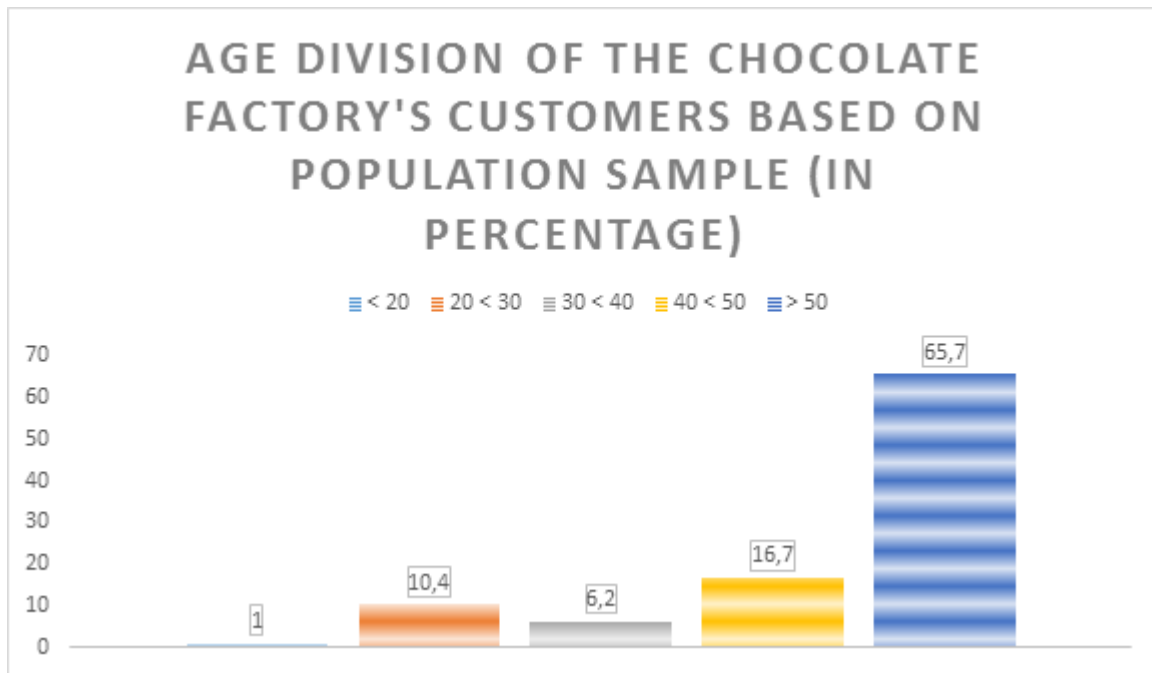
- 1
- 10,4
- 6,2
- 16,7
- 65,7

Figure 4: Age division of the chocolate factory's customers based on population sample

This graphic clearly shows that a large majority of customers are over 50 years old. Following from far by the category of people aged from 40 to 50 years old, represented by 16.7% of respondents. This information is very useful because young people don't have the same behaviours concerning the use of social media than older people. Therefore, the company needs to take this information into account while establishing its communication strategy.

The next question was designed in order to define the significance for customers of handmade products in food industry. (see Figure 5)

## SIGNIFICANCE OF CRAFT PRODUCTS IN FOOD INDUSTRY BASED ON POPULATION SAMPLE (IN PERCENTAGE)

≡ A lot   ≡ Moderately   ≡ A little   ≡ Not at all
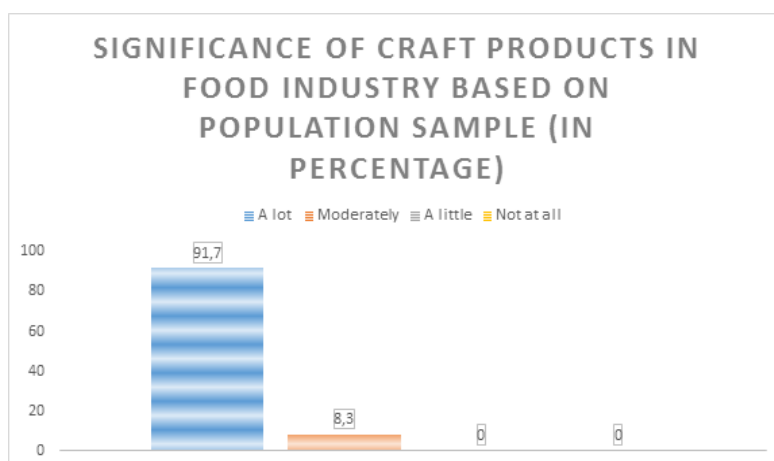
- 91,7
- 8,3
- 0
- 0

Figure 5: Significance of craft products in food industry based on population sample

91.7% of respondent declare according high significance to products origin, especially for food. All respondents are according high to moderate significance to craft products in food industry. This result demonstrate that one of the strength of the chocolate factory is its handmade products.

It is important to know the purchase frequency of customers because regular buyers do not have the same purchase decision behaviour than occasional buyers. Indeed, regular buyer use habitual buying behavior, whereas occasional buyers are more involved in purchase process and use variety-seeking buying behavior. The figure 6 shows the repartition between regular and occasional customers of the company.
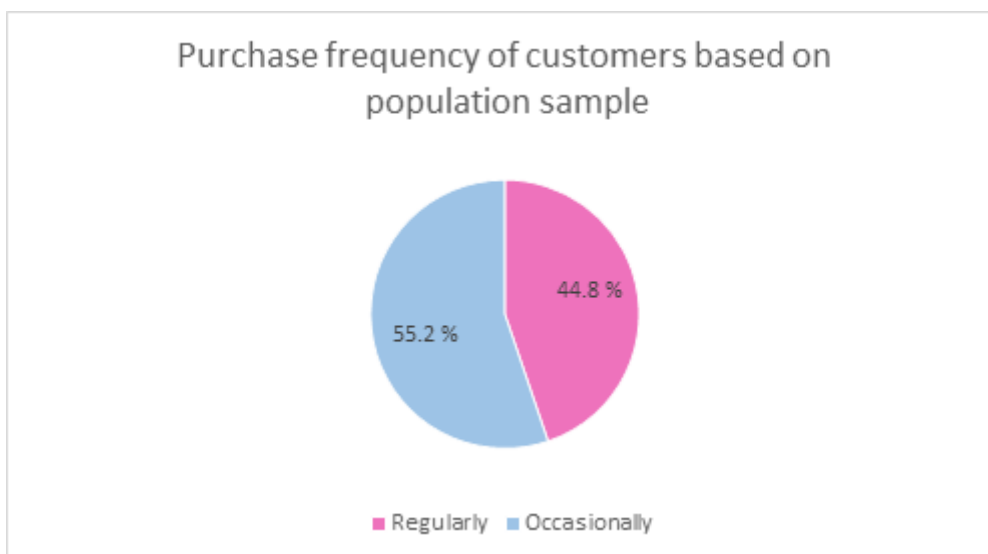


Figure 6: Purchase frequency of customers based on population sample

According to the questionnaire results, it appears that 55.2% of respondents purchase occasionally. In is research, the author considers occasional purchase as a purchase made only for special occasion such as Christmas, Valentine's day, Ester or gifts. On the other hand, regular buyers, represented by 44.8% of respondent, are considered as people who purchase regularly and for their own consumption. Based on the questionnaire results, most of customers are occasional buyers, however the amount between occasional and regular buyers is very small. Therefore, the company cannot afford to focus on only one category and has to consider both as equally important.

Knowing customers location helps to define in which area the company needs to advertise in order to reach their targeted audience. Therefore, the author tried to define the average distance between customers' home location and the chocolate factory's location. Results are presented in Figure 7.
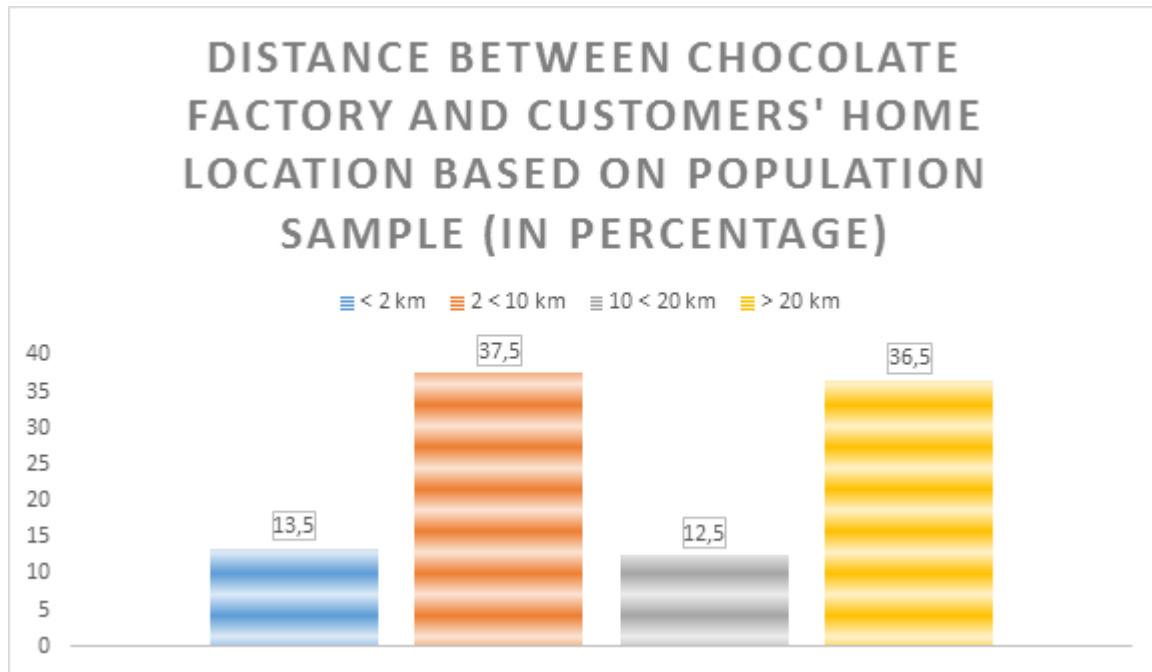


Figure 7: Distance between chocolate factory and customers' home location based on population sample

According to questionnaire results, it appears that most of customers live between two and ten kilometres away from the chocolate factory. This category is represented by 37.5% of respondent. However, this category is closely followed by customers who live further than twenty kilometres away from the chocolate factory. On the other hand, 13.5% of respondent have their home located closer than two kilometres from the company, while 12.5% are located between ten and twenty kilometres away from the company..

Based on a map of the area and the high number of existing competitors, the author considers people living further than twenty kilometres away from the chocolate company as tourists. However, tourists are not necessary one-time buyers. For example, tourists can be people coming occasionally to visit the chocolate factory every time they are traveling in the area. On the other hand, tourists can also be people coming from other country who are visiting the area just once in their life.

After analysing the first part of the questionnaire, the author can already established a general customer profile of the company. According to the questionnaire results, a large majority of the chocolate factory customers are female. More than half of customers are women older than fifty years old. Customers mostly live in a radius of ten kilometres around the chocolate factory. However, there is still an important amount of customers that are living further than twenty kilometres away from the company. There is almost as much regular buyers as occasional buyer. Almost all of customers highly consider craft products in food industry.

The second part of the questionnaire was design in order to define customers' purchase experience. To achieve this goal, the author designed three questions.

The first question was designed in order to define main sources of the company awareness. Figure 8 presents the impact of these different sources.
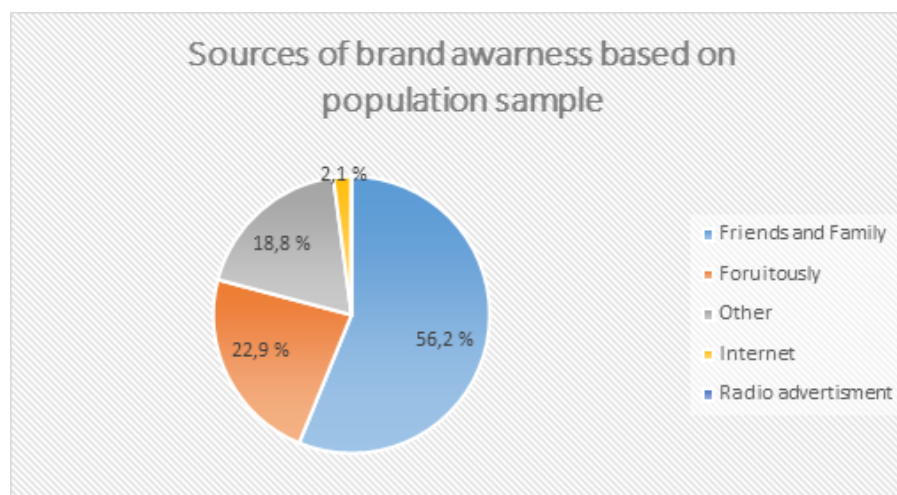


Figure 8: Sources of brand awareness based on population sample

According to questionnaire results, 56.2% of respondent got to know the company thanks to friends and family. It means the word of mouth is currently the most efficient advertisement for the chocolate factory. 22.9% of respondents declared to have known the company fortuitously, just because they were passing by. 2.1% of respondents got to know the company via the Internet, using search engines or company's webpages. On the other hand, 18.8% of respondents know the chocolate factory through other sources such as tourism offices, tour book and similar. Some of

respondents were customers for more than twenty years so they did not really remember how they get to know the company in the first place.

The company recently run an advertising campaign on radio. Therefore, the author decided to include this answer's possibility to the questionnaire. However, as none of the respondents declared to know the chocolate factory thanks to this campaign, this proposition does not appear on the figure 8.

The author also decided to ask the customers what was the company's strength according to their opinion. The first reason is that sometimes, CEO's vision of the company is different than the customer's vision of the company and marketing is focus on customers' perception. The second reason was that the author wanted to use these answer in order to identify customers' wants. All answers were reported in Figure 9. As respondents may give several answers, the results are expressed in points instead of percentage. Total points for this question are 118.
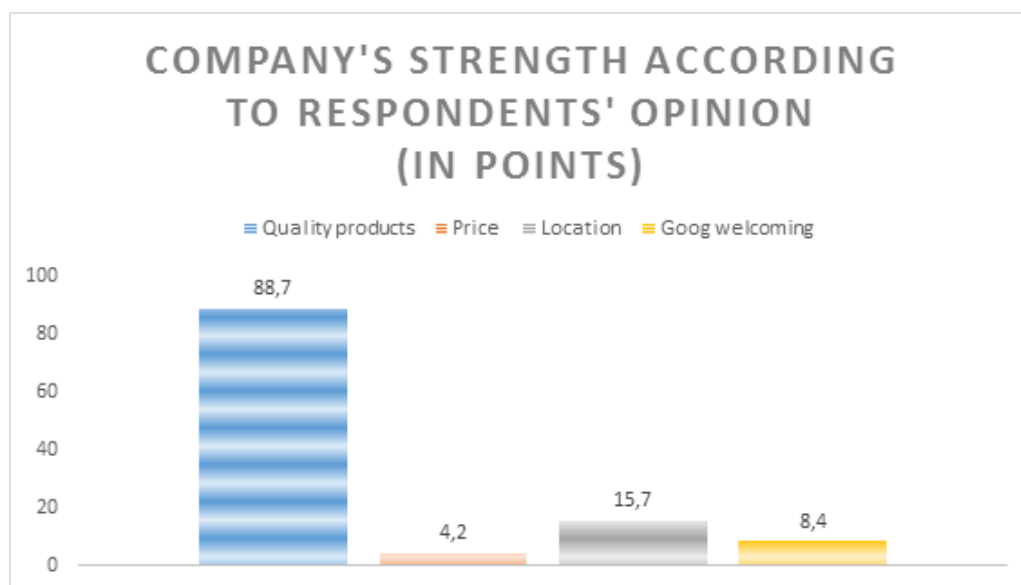


Figure 9: Company's strength according to respondent's opinion

Based on questionnaire analysis, the main strength of the chocolate factory according to the customers is the quality of the products with a total of 88.7 points. Second strength according to customers is the location with 15.7 points. Following strength points were the good welcoming and then the price of the products.

By using these answers, the author can deduce the wants of the customers of the chocolate factory, which are: high quality products sell close to their living place.

The final question regarding customers experience was about their satisfaction. The author asked customers how they would define the quality of the company's services. The following graphic (Figure 10) summarise the given answers in percentage.
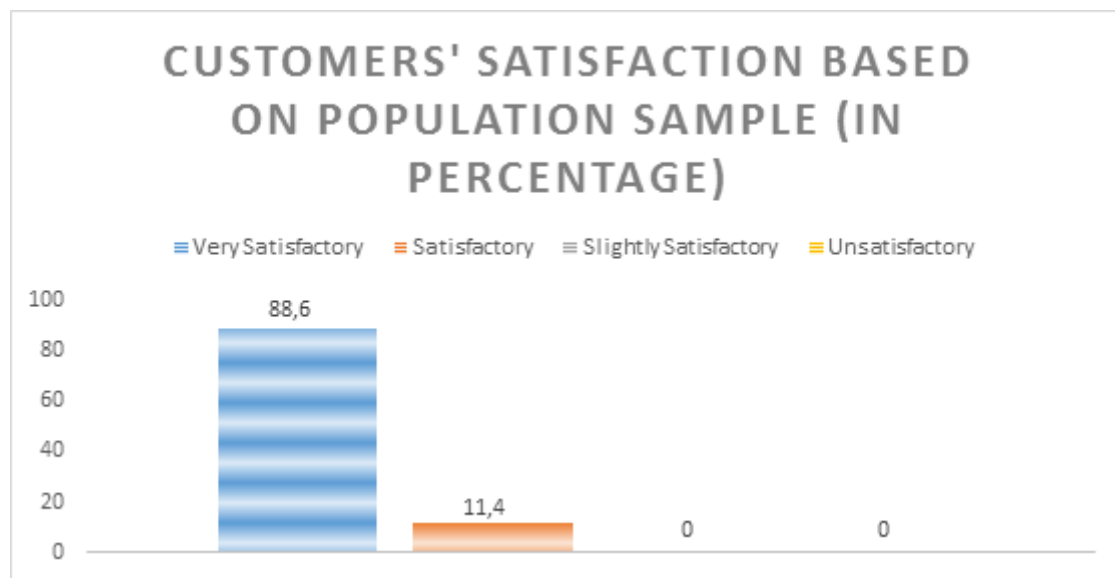


Figure 10: Customers' satisfaction based on population sample

According to questionnaire results, 88.6% of respondents declare being very satisfied by the chocolate factory's services. 11.4% of them is satisfied. None of respondents declared being slightly satisfied or unsatisfied. As mentioned earlier, customers' buying behaviour in this case is variety-seeking buying behavior. Therefore, it is very important to satisfied customers as they could easily switch brands otherwise. These results can explain why 56.2% of customers get to know the company thanks to friends and family. Indeed very satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the company's services and products to their relatives.

The final part of the questionnaire was designed in order to evaluate the chocolate factory's social website and its impact on customers. To achieve this objective, two questions were ask in the questionnaire. The first question the author asked to the

customers was: Did you know the company is active on Facebook? The following diagram (Figure 11) summarise the given answers.
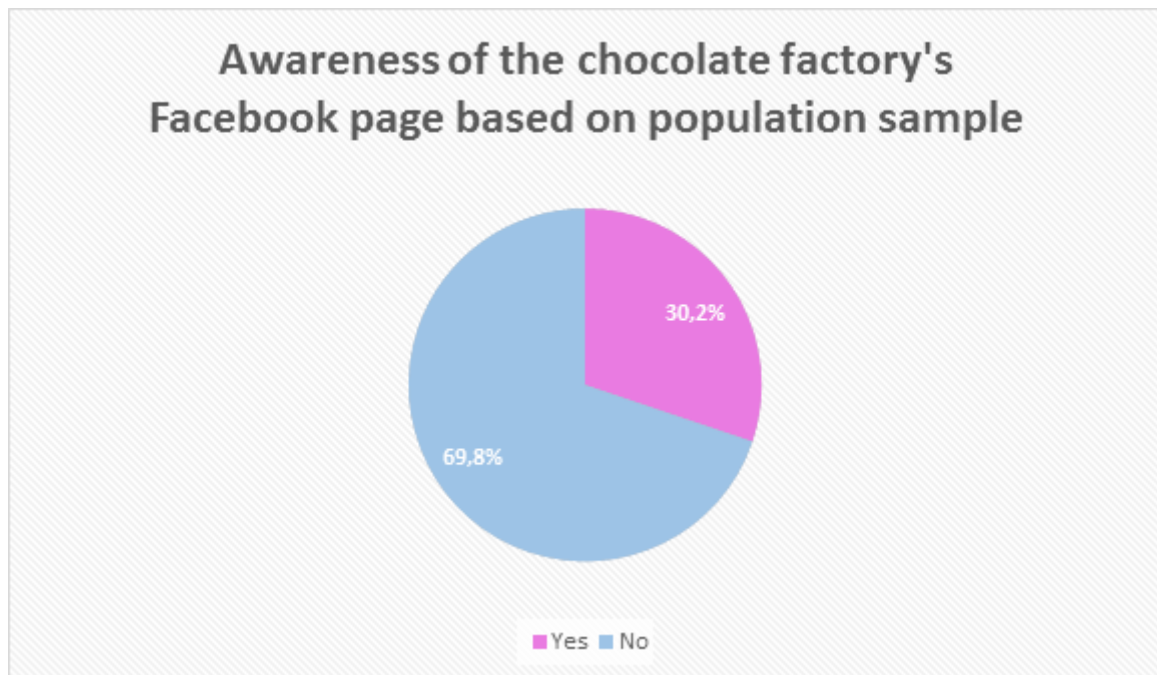


Figure 11: Awareness of the chocolate factory's Facebook page based on population sample

The only social media platform the chocolate factory is active on at this moment is Facebook. Based on the questionnaire results, only 30.2% of respondent was aware of the company's Facebook page. It means that more than two customers over three does not have this information.

The second question was addressed to respondents who declare being aware of the chocolate factory's Facebook page. In this question, respondents had the opportunity to give their personal opinion on the company's Facebook page. Figure 12 illustrates the given answers.

Figure 12: Customers' opinion regarding the company's Facebook page

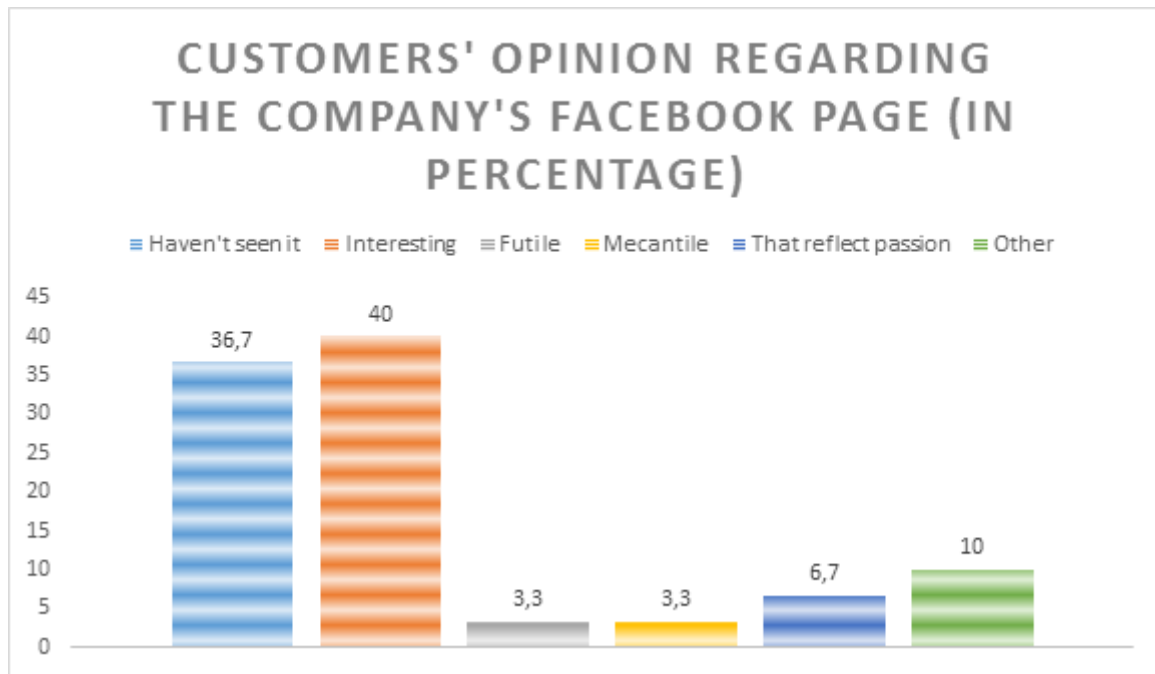This question was an open question. Therefore, respondents had the possibility to specify their answer. All respondents who checked le box "other" specify they did not have opinion on the subject.

Over the 30.2% of respondent who declared being aware of the company's Facebook page in the previous question, 40% of them find page interesting. 36.2% never visited this webpage. 10% did not have clear opinion on the subject. 6.7% of respondent believe that the chocolate factory's Facebook page reflect the passion employees have for their work. Only a few of respondent believe this is a futile and mercantile webpage.

The main information resulting from this question is that 40% of customers aware of the page follow it with interest. However, 36.7% of customers aware of the Facebook page have never seen it. Amount the total of customers, 81.3% are not aware of the company's Facebook page. Therefore the author can assume social media does not have major influence on the purchase behaviour of the chocolate factory's customers.

## 5.2 Interview summary and outcomes

Based on outcomes of the questionnaire, an interview was organised with the author's main correspondent inside the company. As the author and the company are not located in the same country, the interview was made by phone and completed via emails. Data is collected through notes and summarised in order to define outcomes.

The aim of this interview was to collect information used in order to establish an efficient communication strategy that meets the company's resources and objectives. The correspondent was the person officially in charge of social media communication.

During this interview, three formal questions were addressed to the correspondent. After a while, the interview ended up as a professional conversation. Therefore this allows the author to gather information without asking formal questions and also information she would not have thought asking for.

The aim of the first question was to define the company's objectives regarding marketing and communication. The result was that the main marketing objective for the chocolate factory is to reach more company. Indeed the company is developing its capacity to work in B2B sector. Secondly, the company is willing to attract more tourists. Visitors have always had the possibility to visit the factory in order to discover how the chocolates are made. However, since a few years, the company is trying to develop its tourism capacity by organising more attractive touristic tours. The chocolate factory also has a partnership with local tourism office tourism media platform such as TripAdvisor.

The second question concerned the budget the chocolate factory allows to marketing and communication process. It is very important to know the budget the company is willing to allow. However as a very small company, the chocolate factory has a very low budget. All resources used to established and run the communication strategy

need to be at very low cost or, even better for the company, free. The budget is so low that the chocolate factory cannot afford to hire a community manager.

The final question was about the main issues the company is facing regarding its marketing or communication. As mentioned before, the company does not have official community manager, therefore they are facing a lot of different issues. First of all, the author's correspondent was the only person in charge of social media communication and marketing.

The main issue is that she does not have enough time to allow to social media communication management, as she is alone to manage it. Moreover, it is not her main activity. The second issue is that it is difficult to find inspiration and always renew herself.  Result of these issues was that the company's Facebook post are not regularly posted and have always the same shape: picture with small description.

During the discussion, the author's correspondent told the company's official website will be completely renewed in order to be accessible from all devices and also make it more attractive.

It appears that marketing and communication are not a priority for the company. The chocolate factory is aware of the positive outcomes of communication strategy. However, it seems for now the company is more focus on developing its internal capacity.

## 5.3 Author's suggestions based on research results

After the analysis of questionnaire results and based on the interview's outcomes, the author elaborates some suggestions for the chocolate in order to help the company to improve their social media activity. As the marketing is not the priority of

the company and its budget is very low, the author decided to focus on publications' quality instead of paid advertisement.

First of all, it is important to mention again that the chocolate factory is only active on one social media platform, which is Facebook. Since the company does not have a proper community manager and not enough time to allow on such process, the author agreed with the strategy to focus on only one platform. However, the marketing and the communication on this social media platform needs to be very well established. The author's suggestions in order to improve the company's Facebook page efficiency are the following:

· ✦ Facebook publications have to be regularly posted. The publication frequency needs to be defined according to the available time the chocolate factory has to allow to the project. The authors would define the optimum frequency for such a company as one publication per week. Always on the same day, if possible.

· ✦ In addition to the posting regularity, posts need content which is more valuable for customers. In this situation, post content is define by the authors as all pictures, videos and texts of publications. As a small hand-made chocolate factory lead from father to son, the author's advice is to communicate using positive emotional values such as family, happiness, sharing… Emotional value can be transmitted through humorous content, talent's demonstration or through content related to a cause that seems fair for the reader. As a company, which also creates unique pieces on customers' order, it could be beneficial for the chocolate factory to communicate around the artistic aspect of such activities as well.

· ✦ Currently, the company's online publications all look the same. This can lead to a monotonic effect that can discourage the audience. It will be beneficial for the chocolate factory to publish varied content. Alternate content's format between photos, videos, articles and so on will raise audience's interest.

Moreover, by using this strategy, the chocolate factory's communication will reflect its products: varied, originals and high-quality. As only one person is in charge of social media campaign, the author understands that it can be difficult to find new posting ideas. Therefore, she suggests the person in charge to organised meetings with all employees in order to collect ideas. These can be one hour meetings organised once a month. In order to foster creativity and confidence, meetings can be professional discussion where everyone can give his/her opinion while drinking coffee or tea for example.

·         ✦ However, all these efforts to improve the quality of the company's publication is useless if nobody is aware of the Facebook page existence. Therefore the chocolate factory needs to expand its social media network and audience. If a reader likes, comments and/or share a publication, all his/her social media network can see the publication. Then it becomes like a virtual recommendation. As mentioned earlier, in order to induce an audience's reaction, content needs to have worth value for them. It is also possible to induce reaction of the company's audience by initiate small debates or conversations, by encourage them to share their opinion or experience, as well as organise small contest games.

# 6. CONCLUSION

Social media platforms became popular at the beginning of the 21st century. Although the number of platforms and active users is rapidly growing, social media platforms were mainly used in order to chat and share personal content with friends and family.

At the beginning of 2010's digital marketing highly raised. Digital advertisement became more and more accessible and affordable to every companies. However, in some industries such as touristic intrusty for example, competition is very dense and companies always need to differentiate themselves. Therefore, companies started to communicate advertisement on social media platforms and it slowly became a new marketing tool.

During this research, the author's objectives were to discover the level of influence of social media on customers behaviour in craft food industry using a french company case named Chocolaterie Thibaut. In order to achieve her goal, the author distributed questionnaire to the company's customers. To go further, an interview has been organised with the employee who is in charge of communication. This interview was based on the author's understanding of customer behaviors and her analysis of questionnaire results. The aim of this interview for the author was to define the chocolate factory's communication and marketing objectives as well as its main issues on the subject.

In this thesis, research questions are:

*How companies can use social media to influence customers behaviour, and most particularly their purchase decision?*

Based on the analysis of influencing factors of customers behaviour the author tried to find:

*How could the company "Chocolaterie Thibaut" use more efficiently social media as a marketing tool?*

First of all, main influencing factors of customers purchase decision used in social media are the following:

● Online marketers generated content such as paid ads or display banners. Indeed the company can create a social media account and published content in order to reach their customers and prospects. However, online marketers do not have all influencing power on social media.

● Several previous researches has shown that customers are more likely being influenced by their social connection. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that customers are easily influenced by someone they trust and know the reliability.

In order to determine how the company case "Chocolaterie Thibaut" could use more efficiently its social media account, the authors sent a questionnaire to the company's customers in order to define a customer profile. 101 questionnaires were filled in, however five of them were considered as unreliable because respondents did not answered all questions. In total, 96 questionnaires were analysed. Findings are the following:

● Three respondents over four are female. 51% of respondent is female older than 50.
● 92% of respondent considers craft products in food industry very important.
● 88% of respondent is very satisfied by the chocolate factory's products and services and would highly recommend the company to relatives.
● 60% of respondent was not aware the company was active on social media platform, most particularly on Facebook.

An interview was also organised, based on questionnaire findings. During this interview, the authors had the opportunity to learn more about the company's objectives and issues employee were facing regarding social media campaign management. During this interview, the author found out the chocolate factory does not have clear communication strategy. This can be explained by different factors:

- The company does not have community manager
- The budget the chocolate factory allows to marketing and communication is very low and almost non-existent.
- The only employee in charge of communication does not have real formation on marketing and communication strategy.

Based on all information gathered, the author provided the following advice to the company:

- Post publications more regularly, for example once a week
- Vary posts formats in order to raise audience's interest
- Post valuable content for the audience based on emotional added value
- Encourage customers to interact on social media by starting conversations or debates, organising small contest games…

All research process progressed as planned. From proceeding this thesis, the author learned a lot about the way to improve a social media marketing campaign. Moreover, working with a company case helped the author developing her critical sense. However, there were some difficult moments, especially about structuring the author's ideas. Mixed method was used during this research, which allowed the author to practice methodology she had never used before. The author wishes she could have gone further. Indeed marketing and communication process is a continuous process that always needs modifications and improvements.

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# APPENDIX

This survey has been created as part of an educational marketing research. All answers are anonymous, therefore no piece of information will be used for personal solicitation purposes. The aim of this approach is to gather information in order to improve our communication. Thank you for your participation.

## Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

## How old are you? (please check the right answer)

☐ < 20 ans

☐ 20 < 30 ans

☐ 30 < 40 ans

☐ 40 < 50 ans

☐ > 50 ans

## How far away is the store from your living place?

☐ < 2 km

☐ 2 km < 10 km

☐ 10 km < 20 km

☐ > 20 km

## Are you a regular or punctual customer?

☐ Regular

☐ Ponctual

## How important is hand-made food for you?

☐ Very important

☐ Moderately important

☐ Slightly important

☐ Not important at all

## How did you hear about our company?

☐ By relatives

☐ On the radio

☐ On internet

☐ Haphazardly

Other :

## Why did you choose this chocolate factory over another?

☐ Product's quality

☐ Price

☐ Proximity

☐ Habits

Other :

## How would you define the quality of our services?

☐ Very satisfactory

☐ Satisfactory

☐ Slightly satisfactory

☐ Unsatisfactory

## Did you know the company is on social media?

☐ Yes

☐ No

## How would you qualify our Facebook page?

☐ I am not aware of this page

☐ Interesting

☐ Futile

☐ Mercantile

☐ That reflect passion

Other :

Personal comment