



**Tom Matura**

**THE RELATION MARKETING THROUGH THE ERA OF DIGITALISATION: SOCIAL  
MEDIA AND ENDORSEMENT STRATEGY**

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Author Tom Matura		Supervisor Vesa Puhakka	
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Abstract <p>Relation marketing might be one of the most important components of the marketing mix. However, the digitalization of advertisements and customers changed the way of brand-customer interactions. This new trend obliges brands to adjust their strategy. To do so, companies hire influencers (which are closer to their target audience) to promote their products and services in the hope it will be beneficial. In our research paper, we propose to analyze and update previous theories about endorsement and draw the future of relation marketing as an opening.</p> <p>To do so, we compiled previous theories in our research paper and we set five hypotheses representing the five main theories about endorsement. Those theories have been checked by a sample consisting of hundred people from all generations in a survey we conducted. Thanks to this survey, we found out that two of the previous theories remain currently correct, we also found out that one was partially correct and we refuted two theories which seem to not remain correct. Our findings provide updated theories. This is especially important for people who are questioning what they should do about an endorser and what kind of strategy to set to get a good relation marketing through the endorser parameters.</p>			
Keywords Relation marketing, digitalization, endorser, endorsement, social media			
Additional information			

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The subject chosen is an important topic in the business field, especially when people are creating a company or launching a product on the market. Marketing is a thick topic which has been studied many times with different angles but which is extremely complex since marketing techniques need to be changed in accordance to the new generations of people and technologies.

However, even if many studies have been carried out on the digital marketing topic, we have decided to do one study more on the topic of digital marketing because digital technologies are having and will have a significant impact in our future (Kannan & Li, 2017). The main point of our work will be to compile a lot of scientific studies done on the topic and to focus on the customer relationship with brands in the era of digitalization. This phenomenon can lead to customer loyalty. The phenomenon will be studied with an angle which includes both, customer relationships through the study already done previously but also by our own study where we will ask people worldwide their opinion about previous theories to see if they remain actually and currently veracious.

To start this study, let us explain the context. We are in a world where the competition is absolute. The creation of companies has never been that easy and brands need to face each other to try to get the spotlight. To do so, competitors are challenging our imagination about innovation and creation of products. To perform and to let their company reach their goals, owners need to create their own place in the market but this is not easy. With the globalization of the economy, companies worldwide are in competition. Customers want the best and would not hesitate to change their daily consumption companies or brands to another offering with more advantages. At the time or any company can have a competition on another one for the other side of the world, the report done by the Havas group (2019) called Meaningful brand has never been as eloquent as now. The report highlights that 77% of brands could disappear and no-one would care. The report continued by saying since Meaningful Brands®

research began in 2008, this is a major three-point hike on the Meaningful Brands® 2017 results.

Furthermore, technologies such as mobile devices, computers, social media are more and more used in our daily life, which means that digital marketing has and will have more and more weight through the years. According to the statistics from Statista (2021) in 2021, there were 14.91 billion mobile devices in the world and projections are planning 18.22 billions of mobile devices in 2025. Moreover, if mobile devices are spreading in the world the same applies for social media. Supported by the spread of mobile devices, social media which include blogs, forums, social networks such as facebook instagram, snapchat, twitter etc. are growing. Today, according to a report from Statista (2021) there are 4.2 billions active social media users whose 4.15 billion are mobile social media users. Nonetheless, in our study we will focus on social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook etc.

## **1.2 Goal of the research and research problems**

In our study the goals which will be followed are the demonstration and the clarification of the relationship marketing strategy phenomenon through previous studies which will be compiled in our own research. This first goal is to have a clear study, compiling previous studies on the same topic and updating them in accordance with the results provided by our survey. Our second goal is to provide objective material able to guide people, companies, brands and further research in the right direction to update their methods, their results. The structure of our study is done in a sense to bring face to face previous studies and actual phenomena through a qualitative and quantitative data collection.

During our study, we will focus on different components such as social media use, the celebrity endorsement and influencer phenomenon, and relationship marketing through the endorsement strategy. Relationship marketing is defined by Payne and Frow (2009) as *“Relationship marketing is the strategic management of relationships with all relevant stakeholders in order to achieve long term shareholder value. Critical tasks include the identification of relevant relational forms for different stakeholders and the segments and sub-groups within them and the optimal management of*

*interactions within these stakeholder networks.*”. We aim to provide a current vision of digital marketing strategy by highlighting the customer relationship management done by brands through social media and through futur technologies and see how it evolves or would evolve in the future.

As we were describing earlier, our world is more challenging and this will not go better, the competition will not change in the near future. The only way for a brand to succeed in this world is to differentiate itself from others. Having a good relationship with their customers is definitely a way to do it. According to a study done by Reichheld and Schefter (2000), increasing customer retention rates by 5% increases profits by 25% to 95%. Companies should use customer relationships as a cornerstone in their strategy.

Furthermore, during our study process we will approach the endorsement topic and this is a broad topic. We will develop the topic to get a good overview on how to increase the awareness of the audience and especially how to get a bigger audience through influencer and celebrity endorsement. Influencers have today strategic positions on social media and a lot of companies are using them and hoping they will have a positive return. Trivedi and Sama (2020) highlight the role of influence in their study. They argue that influencers by their attitude with followers (customers) can increase the customer engagement and strengthen brand attitude. In our study, We will link previous studies with our own one to get complete results on how the influencer role is perceived by customers and its impact on brands. We aim to provide data which is as close as possible to the actual situation.

Now we have stated our research goals, we can approach our personal reasons to treat this topic. The first one would be about the understanding of the customer relationship phenomenon. For Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020), relationship marketing can be interpreted as loyalty building strategy done through the interactivity between a brand or a company with its audience. This relationship marketing drives customer loyalty which is a phenomenon that companies try to reach in order to get a large audience to sell their product and to get a sort of predefined audience at the moment to launch a new product on the market. According to our diploma which is International Business Management, we can not skip the marketing part which is

highly correlated to a product's success whether or not. It is important as well for a future manager to understand a growing sector which is marketing. Finally, our diploma provides us with some abilities to be a manager in a huge amount of managerial positions and marketing manager could be one of them.

Moreover, we believe the marketing process is the process where the passion is created for a good or a service. With the accession of social media worldwide, marketing has been more and more needed for companies especially since advertisements can be spread into viral posts. According to a study done by Minsky and Quesenberry (2016), a survey revealed a majority of consumers have been influenced by their social media content during their purchases journeys. Relationship marketing strategy is a cornerstone of a success story. This is where the “magic” happens. In order to prove it we could highlight the expense of companies in this field. It even seems that we could apply the Pareto principle for the business according to Lavinsky (Forbes, 2014) as 20% of your customers represent 80% of your sales. so customers are highly related to success. Without a customer, you can have the best business idea ever, you will not succeed to do anything. Customers are the key to a company's success. The problem is some customers do not get satisfaction from the customer services and that is costing a lot for companies. According to Hyken (Forbes, 2018) poor customer service is costing businesses more than \$75 billion a year.

Finally, we could add a personal motivation for this study as we already did some previous thesis during our bachelor's. One of our previous papers was on a component of a marketing strategy which was about celebrity endorsement and its effect in the mind of people. This master thesis could go further and bring added value to our knowledge by completing the knowledge acquired during our previous studies but also to get a bigger picture of a marketing strategy with its all components to create a successful marketing campaign.

The customer relationship through digital marketing is an important topic. In fact, nowadays, the relationship between brands and customers is difficult to create and especially to maintain. Customers have a bigger range of products to consider and a lot of different brands advertising on the internet including their social media and email to try to catch them. Nevertheless, by having advertisements coming directly to them



through their social networks people are also more and more wanting the information on their product as fast as possible without going to the shop. This is especially true for the younger generation. According to Holliman and Rowley (2014), people are often using the internet as their first information source on a product or a service. People doing so are also the people who are the most influenced by their social media content on their purchase intention. It means it is possible for a brand present on social media through influencer, advertisement or own account to get the favor of a consumer and influence their decision making process and then the customer relationship.

Moreover, for years now, consumers are also more inclined to give comments and share their opinion on social media about products and this is an important milestone in the customer relationship with the brand. Most of them are expecting an answer from the brand in order to feel considered and to feel important. Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden (2011) revealed the thinking of consumers using social networks. It seems people who are using social media as a platform to communicate with their friends, family or any other groups would like and expect the same interactivity with brands and companies. To answer this new need from customers, companies are hiring community managers trying to reply to people to give them satisfaction. Influencers can also endorse that role since they have a wide community to entertain and to maintain. The interactive relationship between a brand and its consumer is a real need.

Besides, the digital marketing topic is broad as we said previously and that could be a part to explain the relevance of our topic. To have a broad topic means there is some area and some angle of studies which have not been explored and this is especially why we choose this topic. Moreover, in marketing, more and more people are using social media. This is even “the” tool of relationship marketing. Almost every brand is using social media through their own account, influencer or advertisement specially created for those platforms. According to Stelzner (Social media examiner, 2015) brand marketing services have totally adopted the social media waves since 96% of companies use them. Companies use them for sales and advertisement goals. His study goes even further saying that 92% of companies are even considering their social media as an important part of their business goals.

Knowing it, we would like to provide a study summarizing previous theories about relationship marketing and add our own study to them. We check if they remain actually and currently correct. Entrepreneurs, start ups and other businesses could benefit from our study of the truthfulness and updated data to see the best way to improve relationship marketing through social media.

### **1.3 Research gap**

Currently, some studies have already been done on celebrity endorsements, influencers and relationship marketing as well. We know the factors of success for a company. We can call this brand admiration. Park, MacInnis and Eisingerich (2016) argue brand admiration as the factor permitting to measure the customer relationship between consumer and brands. For them, brand admiration has three components, the brand love, the brand trust and the final one which is the brand respect.

Brand love is defined by Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence (2009) as the passion consumers may have about a brand. This is easy to observe, we can for example have a look at Apple stores worldwide when a new Iphone is released. There are always people coming hours before the opening time of those stores to be sure to have the new Iphone released and be the one of first people to get it. This is possible through a process according to Alex and Joseph (2012), the psychological affinity with the brand is the first step, it can be linked to the ideas, values, and concept the brand represents. The positive attitude of consumers toward the brand is the second component which is the perception of the brand by the consumer. Finally, a good brand experience which is obviously the quality perceived and procured by a product or service from the brand.

Brand trust is the second factor to explain brand love. A company or business which is trusted for its ability to answer to the needs of customers, but also by the quality of its products and its relationship with customers is usually able to meet the success. According to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) the brand trust is the fact a company, brand or business is able to ensure its committed function and its customers can expect it. Moreover, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) found that brand trust impacts brand loyalty.

Park, MacInnis and Eisingerich (2016) explain the success of brands such as Google, Apple, Disney and Nike as the consequence of brand admiration by their consumers. According to Trivedi and Sama (2020), brand admiration is possible because the relationship between a brand and its customers is strong. This is what our study will bring. Relationship marketing is a factor of brand admiration. Our study will provide new data on this phenomenon through the era of digitalization. Social media and influencers (celebrity and others) are part of relationship marketing nowadays and it is important to understand how it works in order to get the best result possible.

Knowing relation marketing is evolving a lot through generations, our study aims to be a sort of update of previous theories and will try to draw the future of customer relations with brands. Our point is to create a study with a lot of previous theories included in order to get a combination of them. We will check if old theories remain currently right in the era of social media and we will check as well if recent theories are still right. This study could update those previous theories or confirm whether they remain correct. We will also provide a part of our thesis to draw the future of relation marketing and this is to open the research on new digital tools and new ways to use marketing. This part will be a sort of first research on a possible future of customer relationship with brands through new technologies.

#### **1.4 Research question(s)**

Based on our research gap, we found out the relation between a brand and its customer is a treasure brands need to cultivate. Some brands and companies seem to have created a strong brand admiration which is the final step of relation marketing. This brand admiration creates brand loyalty and this is so important for companies. This is why we have defined a main topic based on brand and customer relationship. This topic is The relation marketing through the era of digitalisation: Social media and endorsement strategy.

In order to present our topic, we decided to orient our studies to the endorsements and influencers world. We would like to see if endorsers could be a part of this particular relation created between brands and customers but also which social media to use to aim to create it. This thesis orientation has brought some questions to our mind that

we have defined under the name of “Hypothesis” in our study. We have a total of five hypotheses which have been written in accordance to the previous theories to verify them. Those five hypotheses need to be answered in order to reply to our main question.

To answer our question we planned to do a quantitative and qualitative survey. This survey will help us to understand the phenomenon behind endorsers but also to understand what people would like brands to do in order to improve the customer relationship. This study will be held in French, due to our broad network there.

However, in our survey, we are also asking some open questions on what people think about a phenomenon and let them write down their opinion. This type of question will let us know a bit more about why people answered others' questions in a certain sense and also might highlight some phenomenon we haven't thought of earlier.

Our survey will be a survey asking information about what people think about some information provided in the questions. It means, we will write some facts and people will answer by yes or no if they are agreeing with the fact or not. We have also a part of the survey which is about the perception of people towards endorsements and the future of relation marketing. This study tries to be as much as possible neutral and not bring any implicit suggestion, we want the real opinion of people and not a “fake” one. In order to do so, we haven't formulated any suggestions but just give some facts in accordance with the theories and see if people agree or disagree with those. We are also asking them their opinion at the end of the survey where they can write down their thoughts to be sure people are answering their thoughts and not what they think they should answer.

In our thesis we have decided to use as much as possible reliable sources. Those sources are important in order to have a thought which is illustrated by theories or scientific people. Those thoughts usually have more credibility and have been explored through studies which is why they are more reliable.

## **1.5 Used research methods**

The material we are using are scientific articles which is the biggest part of our sources and material used for this study. We have also used few interviews, few articles from newspapers which are considered as reliable (Forbes) and statistics from statista. We will be using data coming from our survey which is reliable since the way we have done it is safe and not susceptible to be falsified.

These combinations of data are suitable to answer our research question because we need to have previous theories to establish a certain background which is driving us to better understand relation marketing and its different parameters. This is basically done through the scientific articles (our primary sources of information). Besides, the fact that we have some newspaper information and statistics is also helping to introduce the topic and highlight its importance even if those sources have been used only a few times in our thesis paper. Finally, having our own data thanks to our survey is an added value since it is bringing current vision of the brand customer relationship.

## **1.6 Structure of the study**

Our study will have three main parts for its structure. Our first chapter would be the theoretical chapter where all the facts coming from existing sources will be mentioned and used to demonstrate the existing theories on customer relationships through digital marketing. By compiling different articles together, we aim to create an objective study on the effect of digital marketing on customer relationships. We have split this first part into different chapters explaining the social media segmentation and the influencer and celebrity endorsement. This first part will only focus on what is done now by companies. However, we know it would not be enough to confirm those theories and this is why we will provide our own data. After each chapter of our first part, some hypothesis will be defined and this will help us to do our second part which is the survey one.

The second part will be the survey part and its results. We called it the methodology. This part will be done thanks to a survey we will launch in French, our native language. Nevertheless, our different data will be mixed together to get only one big collection

of data. Once our data collection will end, we will refute or confirm theories suggested in our first part. The framework will be the first chapter about the methodology of the survey, then the data collection and finally its results.

We will then have a conclusion to correlate our first and second part and see the differences between both our background research and the data collected results. This will be to highlight our results and to put the emphasis on what is really working according to our study.

Finally, a fourth part will be done about the future of the customer relationship through digital marketing. In this part, we will try to imagine what would be the future of the customer relationship with brands and companies in the metaverse or with an advanced artificial intelligence. This part will be done according to some scientific sources but also thanks to our ideas of the future which would be as realistic as possible according to the technologies capabilities and projects started now. This part could then be more subjective compared to our study but would still be interesting in order to give a certain direction/idea to companies to manage their customer relationships.

## **2 THE INTRODUCTION OF SOCIAL MEDIAS**

### **2.1 The use of social media**

Digital tools have more and more impact in our daily life. The first tool we will talk about will be social media in their globality. We can write down here which social media will be our references. In this paper work, we will talk about different kinds of social media, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Youtube and the last borned we called, Tiktok. As we can see, different platforms will be studied and we need also to precise the difference between those social media. We could rank them in different categories such as entertainment (Snapchat, Facebook) or professional (LinkedIn) even if for some of them, the border between entertainment and professional is really blurry (Instagram, Tiktok, Youtube). If we are including social media in our study it is due to their fundamental nature. According to Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels (2009), the fact people use social media to interact with each other is a perfect tool to develop communities and to take care of them. People by interacting can influence each other and have a direct impact on brands and companies. Social media are also providing a higher response rate and a better engagement which is also easier to mesurate compare to traditional marketing.

Nowadays, the use of social media has exploded, people use those platforms a lot to the point where it is difficult to find a person who does not have any social media, or a cell phone which does not have any social media app. Auxier and Anderson (2021) have conducted a study in the United States and it is clearly highlighting that an average of 7 adults out of 10 are using social media. We could even go further and say, today, navigating on social media is a real daily time consumption activity because according to statista (2020), In 2020, people were spending 145 minutes daily on social media. Another data correlated to the time spent on social media which is good to highlight is around 60% of Snapchat and Instagram users are going to check their social media at least once per day, and for Facebook the amount of people is over 70% per day (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). According to Schulten et al. (2012) since people' daily consumption of social media content is really high, brands and companies have integrated in their customer communication activities social media such as Facebook, Instagram or Youtube and are extremely active on those platforms.

Nevertheless, it is evident due to the evolution of our society, due to the evolution of interest between generations that people are not using the same type of social media according to their ages.

## **2.2 The social media segmentation**

First of all, to have a clear vision of what we are looking for, we will need to define what is the customer segmentation and why companies are using it. Market segmentation can be defined as dividing a market into distinct groups of customers, with different needs, characteristics or behavior, who might require separate products or who may respond differently to various combinations of marketing efforts (Kotler & Armstrong, 1999). According to Cooil, Aksoy and Keiningham (2008) segmentation can use geographic, psychographic behavioral or demographic criteria to classify people. Some other criteria can be used as well such as situational criterion and so on.

Companies and brands are using this customer segmentation tool to target their potential customers. As we know, companies are producing goods and services which are meant for some categories of people. For example, the brand Thrasher is intended for skaters, the brand Carlton is focused on wealthy people and so on. Companies and brands are using this tool because their resources are limited and they want to maximize the effect of their marketing investment. According to Cooil, Aksoy and Keiningham (2008), the marketing segmentation is critical because a company has limited resources (financial, human etc.), and has to focus on their customers to identify them (categorization) and serve them. Customer segments or categories are created by a certain degree of within-group homogeneity which ensures that people categorized into the same group will respond positively together to the same marketing effort.

However, the segmentation which has the biggest impact on social media is the age segmentation. In fact, according to people' age, we can see that people are not using the same social media and this is why we will focus only on the age of people for the social media segmentation.



### 2.3 Age/generation

As seen previously, customer segmentation holds sway over social media. To have an investment return or at least to get a good marketing campaign (which means reaching the targeted people), brands and companies need to have some overview of the age of their targeted customers. Thanks to this information, companies can invest time and funds to develop their social media accounts/activities in accordance with their strategy to reach their objectives.

In order to use the age data efficiently, researchers find out that people having the same age are mostly acting in the same manner (mindset, behavior etc.). To illustrate this we can go further and say it is commonly used to divide people into different categories called generation. Those categories based on the age (birth dates) are defined by Brodahl and Carpenter (2011) such as the Silent Generation (1925-45), the Baby Boomers (1946-60), Generation X (1961-81) and Generation Y (born after 1981-1990) and the last one which is the generation Z or Gen Z (born after 1991).

However, there is no consensus in the classification between academic studies especially about the date where the Generation Z is starting. Some studies are defining the generation Y as the generation born between 1981 to 1999 as Bolton et al. (2013) said in their article, but some other authors defined it as the generation born between 1981 to 1991 as seen previously. This non consensus impact on the starting date of Gen Z, which is sometimes defined as starting in 1991 (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2017) or in 2000.

Nevertheless, those categories are often used in studies and it was important to define them to have a better understanding of the next part of our report. After this clarification, we can focus on the studies driven by Perrin (2015) from Pew research center, which is highlighting the media usage from 2005 to 2015.

To do so, the study is dividing people into four categories (18–29, 30–49, 50–64 and over 65) which represent more or less the generation defined previously.

Through this study we can get a good idea of how social media grows in our society and how it has an impact on different generations. This study starting in 2005 is interesting because 2005 was the beginning of the interest on social media for people, particularly with the beginning of Facebook.

According to Perrin (2015), at the beginning of social media in 2005, 12% of people aged between 18 to 29 were using social media and only 2% of people over 65 years old were using them. People from 30 to 49 were 8% and people aged between 50 to 64 were 5%. The interesting fact is the increasing use of social media through the years. We can see in this study that all generations are concerned.

Without any surprise, we can be aware that people aged between 18 to 29 years old (generation Y) remain the people using the most of social media since 90% of them are using it. But we can also note an incredible increase for people between 30 to 49 with 77% of them using social media and for people between 50 to 64 with 51% of them using it. We can also have a good overview of the generation with people older than 65 years old, who are up to 35% to use social media in their lives. It is an impressively and surprisingly increase.

As the study highlights, all the generations are prone to a considerable increase in the number of people using social media. This amount of people should not be decreasing in the early future and should maybe even continue to increase since technologies and social media are targeting new customers and more and more people.

Moreover, the type of social media used by different generations is also important to know in order to reach the right customers and to have the maximum impact on the target. Generation Z is not using the same social media as generation X or Y.

#### **2.4 Type of social media**

The type of social media is important to know. As we were writing previously, we will integrate in our paper different social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Youtube and Tiktok. This is the part where we can see which generation is using which social media. It is an essential part of the digital strategy, by targeting

social media companies will increase the awareness of people present on and companies need to target the right one according to your customer base and your brand targeting.

People from the generation Z and Y are more likely to use the last generation of social media such as Snapchat, Instagram and Tiktok. In fact by navigating on those social media platform you can see users' profiles are quite young. The fact that these social media are based on photographs and videos could explain why generation Y and Z are the main users of these social media. Some studies are developing this point of view by saying that generation Y is more narcissistic than previous generations. We can imagine that it is also the case for generation Z. A meta-analysis shows that narcissism (exaggerated self-perceptions of intelligence, academic reputation or attractiveness) in Gen Y college students is higher than in previous generations of students (Twenge et al., 2008).

Some preferences about social media are present. As you know, Generation Z is really active on social media but some of them have their favor. According to Auxier and Anderson (2021) most people between 18 to 29 year olds say they use Instagram or Snapchat and about half say they use TikTok. This might be also because those social media sites are relatively new. Instagram, Snapchat and Tiktok have been founded in 2010, 2011 and 2016. 76% of people between 18 years old to 24 years old are using Instagram daily, 75% of them are using Snapchat and 55% are using Tiktok (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). As well, a new trend is coming such as the use of mobile devices. People and especially the young generation like to use pictures to communicate with their pairs and with the world. They use pictures or their camera to express their feelings. As Fietkiewicz, Lins, Baran and Stock (2016) wrote in their article, we can show the most significant differences between Gen Z and other generations is about the use of Instagram and we can add as well Tik tok and Snapchat which are the same kind of social media. It seems that people born after 1995 use more pictures and video platform sharing such as those social media cited previously. This is a difference with the previous generation. Generation Y is borned with the internet and uses it daily, however, the generation Z is borned with mobile devices and the internet uses the combination of both every day and this reflects their social media usage. PrakashYadav and Rai (2017) confirm it by saying about the generation Z that they

are also really big contributors on social media, they are also kind of experts of those social media platforms since they were born with it. They are also saying gen Z likes online communication and wants to remain connected to this social network via technology available at fingertips.

The Generation Y who were the first generation born with the internet and who were the first users of social media have a different consumption of those than generation Z. Bolton et al. (2013) affirm that the social media use from gen Y changed the consumer identity formation since generation Y aims to have more impact on brands. Their use of social media and their expectations about brands and firms' engagement, but also about the consumer attitudes towards brand (loyalty) and their participation in the creation process have been changed.

However, generation Y needs to be splitted into two categories. The categories borned before 1996 and after 1996. According to Fietkiewicz, Lins, Baran and Stock (2016), the consumption of social networks between these two groups have differences, especially in the type of social media used. People born before 1996 are likely to use Facebook to communicate with their partners. In fact, social media met success in the world when they were able to subscribe to it. However, the people born after 1996 who are still generation Y tend to have the same use as Generation Z which means using more mobile devices and video and picture platform sharing. Besides, from the Pew research center study driven by Auxier and Anderson (2021) 77% of people aged between 30 to 49 years old use Facebook. It is the highest proportion of Facebook users into the different generations. It includes Generation Y born after 1996 and a part of generation X. Finally, Fietkiewicz, Lins, Baran and Stock (2016) the use of LinkedIn is also widespread in this generation since people are working and employed already.

Generation X, as generation Y and Z have a different motivation to use social media. This generation likes particularly to share business related information and political related information on their social media. They use it as well to get news and share it. It appears that generation X is less likely to use social media to be in touch with pairs but more to be aware about news worldwide and express their opinions (Fietkiewicz, Lins, Baran & Stock, 2016). Social networks used by this generation are more likely

to be Twitter and Facebook as well which are some social media where it is easy to get news and to express feelings. According to Auxier and Anderson (2021), 73% of people being 50 years old to 64 years old are using Facebook.

To end our social media type part, we would like to write about a particular case. There is a platform which could not be classified by generation since all of the generation are using it a lot. Youtube, which is a video sharing platform, is definitely used by generation X, Y and Z. This platform which is really well known for its wideness with video on a lot of different topics is used by more than 95% of people being 18 to 29 years old, by more than 91% of people between 30 years old and 49 years old and by 83% of adult aged from 50 to 64 years old. A last surprising statistic highlights that even half of people over 65 years old are using this platform making it the most used social media (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

After defining which social media are used by which generation, companies need to promote and create a relationship with their customers in order to get a good brand image or/and to improve their sales. To do so, companies and brands are facing a dilemma, should they use an influencer, a celebrity to help them in their task.

### **3 CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT AND INFLUENCER**

First of all, we need to define what an influencer is. In fact, it is a role which has existed for a long time, it has radically changed since the digitalization of the world and the accession of social media. An influencer can be defined as trusted tastemakers or as opinion leaders. We selected two definitions which are representing well and in a complete manner the influencer role. The first one is from De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) which define influencer as “people who built a large network of followers, and are regarded as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches - to promote their products “. This definition was close to the reality but is only explaining a part of the influencer job so this is why we needed to choose a second definition to complete the first one. Thorne (2018) defines influencer marketing “as the practice of leveraging opinion leaders to spread word-of-mouth about brands and their products to target audiences”. These two definitions are giving a good overview of the role given to an influencer. Companies and brands can also use a celebrity to influence people. We call that celebrity endorsement, we can define it as the fact a celebrity is promoting a product for a brand in order to influence people in their decision making.

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Before going further on the question and to know if an influencer and/or celebrity endorsement is good to improve the customer relationship between a brand and its audience, we should give some perspective to the influencer market. According to Alassani and Göretz (2019) the marketing done by influencers is considered as one of the most promising digital marketing strategies. Instagram gave the possibility to influencers to do hidden advertisements (advertisement which is not recognized as an advertisement) through their stories or posts. Companies knowing that trends have seen in this phenomenon a big opportunity to promote their products and increase the awareness toward them.

Besides, two other studies confirm it, Brown and Hayes (2007) say influencer marketing is a way consisting in identifying and aiming at influencers in different markets which is requiring a considerable selection in order to succeed to have an authentic and hidden advertisement reaching the potential customers. As for Faßmann

and Moss (2016), Instagram is definitely a social media letting influencer promoting a content (products or services) to individualities and justify their thought by the fact that Instagram have been name the most influential social platform in the world in 2016.

Moreover, to see the influence of hidden advertisement we need to understand how advertisement is working. To do so we can use a study done by Baker and Lutz (2000) naming the stimulus created by advertisement which is called message process involvement. According to Muehling and Laczniak (1988); Krugman (1965) the message process involvement is important because it influences the advertising process and the involvement of the customers toward this advertisement is affecting his response to it. Celsi and Olson (1988) found out that a higher involvement of the consumer toward the advertisement process increases its advertisement attention and leads to a higher cognitive effort in response to the publicity. In the study from Petty and Cacioppo (1986) we can discover the Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) which considers that a higher involvement results toward the advertisement message is done thanks to the central route whereas a low involvement results in an increasing consideration of other dimensions as influencers.

This is incredibly interesting when we know that people are using less and less time by advertisement. Especially because people do not even know that they are advertised through their social media (hidden advertisement). Due to the lack of time spent by advertisement, and also the exponential proliferation of publicity, people do not focus anymore on it and do not take time to process the message delivered. Instead of that people are considerably influenced by endorsers or influencers due to their low involvement in the advertisement process.

The influencer role has been created to answer this disinterest into the advertisement. In order to reach people, traditional advertisements are less and less efficient since new generations are dropping the use of conventional channels such as (media and television). Companies need to find other manners to be in touch with their potential customers and their community and thus to maintain their connections. Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020) were referencing the Association of National Advertisers, by saying that influencer marketing is done to focus on leveraging people' opinions

and marketing activities by delivering a message from the brand to a wider audience thanks to the influencer's social media. Brands are not anymore delivering their messages by themselves but use a third party able to "influence" their community.

Influencers have a major role on the social media sphere and this is why companies use them a lot. Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020) assume that 68% of social media users follow influencers in Spain. We could as well transfer those results to other countries worldwide. The two favorite social media to follow influencers are Facebook and Instagram, with a huge growth for the last one which is growing by 35% from 2018 to 2019. As we can hardly doubt now, influencers are considered as a huge help and promotion tool by companies especially since they have the ability to ride the wave of trends and really influence the consumption and relation between a brand and its customers Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020).

However, in order to get a positive return on their investments in endorsements, influencer marketing companies need to do some pre-work to select the right person to do the promotion for their product. In the next part we will see if a macro or micro influencer has more power on its audience and the perception people have about them.

### **3.2 The choice of influencer (micro influencer or macro influencer)**

First of all, before we get to the heart of the matter, we should explain the difference between a macro influencer and a micro influencer. A lot of influencers are macro influencers which means, influencers with over 100 000 followers on their social media. Usually the social media which is checked to see if people have more than 100 000 followers is Instagram. However, micro-influencers who are influencers having less than 100 000 followers are existing and are more and more used to promote goods and services as IAB Spain (2019) confirms. The metrics of the followers will be used for our study, nevertheless, it can be changing according to the country. For example in the USA (over 300 millions of people living there) the metrics could change and not use the 100 000 followers limits to define a micro or macro influencer. On the other hand, in Finland where the total number of people is around 5 millions of people, the metrics could be lower.



The number of followers an influencer has is often used as a metric to see if a company should resort to this influencer or not. The number of followers is in fact showing the total number of people following this person and is a sort of showcase of the popularity an influencer has. De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) argue that influencers on Instagram with a high amount of followers are usually considered as more popular and since they are more popular they seem to be more likable. Jin et al. (2014) have found the same phenomenon from influencers or celebrities posting positive tweets on twitters. Famous people with a high amount of followers are having a higher and consequent impact on the purchase intention and product involvement compared to the people which are less popular than them. One perfect example to illustrate the remarks of this study is Elon Musk. Elon Musk has over 79 millions followers on Twitter and he is using his community to influence the price of crypto currency as we can see with the shiba inu token or doge coin token. Each time when he tweets about those two crypto currencies, the price goes up.

Nonetheless, if some studies are showing the beneficial side of influencers having a lot of followers, some studies are arguing that number of followers does not mean success of people's engagement with the brand promoted. Cha et al. (2010) agree to say the number of followers is highlighting the popularity of influencers but that would not mean the influencer is retweeted, shared or mentioned by its followers. Romero Galuba, Asur and Huberman (2010) confirm the results from the previous study by observing that high number of followers mean popularity but do not mean engagement of the followers with the influencer's posts. In fact, a celebrity or influencer having a lot of followers does not have time to create "personal" connections with their followers. It means influencers will not take the time to reply to people's posts, will not share back the post from their followers when they are tagged there etc. All of that matters for followers which will lose engagement towards people not taking care of them.

Moreover, the number of followers remains the topic of lies since some services consist of buying fake followers to increase the total amount an influencer has. This practice done in order to get better or more partnerships with brands is deceptive and existing. According to Cresci, Di Pietro, Petrocchi, Spognardi and Tesconi (2015), a person who has a lot of followers but only few followees could highlight the artificial

collection or the creation of fake followers in order to increase their popularity. All of the people with a lot of followers are not faking the popularity. De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) highlight the considerations of people towards influencer and celebrity. In fact, someone having a lot of followers and only following a few people are more likely considered to be true influencers compared to people who are following people and waiting to be followed back by them. De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) argue as well that companies which are wishing to promote divergents product through influencers with high amount of followers could be a bad choice since a high level of followers would mean a decrease in the uniqueness of the product and in the brand perception. It could affect the brand attitudes and repel some people to continue their relationship with the brand because of this marketing choice. Companies should consider it before to work with an influencer which could affect the image of exclusivity and uniqueness of the brand. According to Machleit et al. (2000), Customers could interpret the number of followers of this influencer as the number interested in the product and could then be diverted from the brand since the brand uniqueness image has been lost or decreased by the “mass advertisement”. People who were buying this brand because of the meaning of the brand and the relationships built together through the time could be shaken.

Finally, Alassani and Göretz (2019) says that micro-influencers have some specific characteristics since they are interacting with their followers. They succeed in creating a better social media engagement with people following them and establish some familiarity between its audience and the endorser. By contrast, Alassani and Göretz (2019), affirm that macro influencers have a lower commitment rate and a lower social media engagement. According to their study, the commitment rate is only in a range of 5 to 25 % and that could be because influencers do not create any personal link with their followers and only create an artificial connection with them. In the results of this study, it seems that micro influencers are more efficient in persuasion since they have a better connection with their followers. Kay, Mulcahy and Parkinson (2020) in their study reveal the same results saying that the words and actions done by micro influencers have a higher meaning compared to macro influencers. This could explain why for example the fashion industry is using more macro influencers since people do not need to understand the product conception or anything but just watch how the clothing is done. There is no need for personal connection, brands want a large

audience. According to Alassani and Göretz (2019) 71% of fashion products are promoted by macro influencers. Alassani and Göretz (2019) are also arguing that Fitness products are more often promoted by micro influencers. It could be because micro influencers have personal connections with their audience so they can reassure their audience on supplements and their effect and so on, they might be more trusted.

To have an opinion based on actual fact, we will define some hypothesis and check it in our second part which is the empirical one.

Our hypothesis 1 (H1) : Influencers with a high number of followers have more impact on the purchase intention.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Influencers with a small number of followers are experts on their topic and closer to their community than an influencer with a high number of followers.

To conclude on the struggle towards micro and macro influencer, we could use a study from De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) revealing a result bringing us to our second part, the perception of the influencer. They think the audience reached through an endorser is not the only goal to follow to have an efficient and persuasive communication. Some other parameters should be considered in order to improve the message impact in the community as the trust and likeability which is representing a valued opinion leader.

### **3.3 The perception of endorsers**

The perception people have about influencers is different according to the type of influencer. McCracken (1989) wrote in his study that traditional celebrity which means fame acquired through their activities such as sport, cinema, music, politics differs from influencers in the way they obtained fame and are considered as personal brands. To highlight the difference, there is on one side people getting fame through their activities such as Cristiano Ronaldo in football, Tom Brady in American Football, Madonna in music, Bradley Cooper in cinema. These people have been exposed by the media and got fame through their work and media exposure whereas that social

media influencer such as youtuber for example, just got fame since people like them. Those two types of influencer leverage opinions, however, they might be a difference in the perception people have of them.

Basically, during the influencing marketing process, there is the step to choose which influencer could be good to represent a brand and to know it, it should be done in accordance with people's perception. Biswas, Biswas and Das (2006) argue that the first perception a customer has is about the product. Product knowledge is really important for customers because in the relationship process with the brand, customers are considering the expertise and the familiarity of the endorser (influencer or celebrity) with the goods or services endorsed. In fact, Ilicic and Webster (2016) assume that famous people (influencer or celebrities) have a better and stronger influence on customers and followers when they are perceived as authentic which means when they are not faking expertise or familiarities with the product endorsed. This means endorsers have a huge impact on product knowledge perception. According to Hong and Sternthal (2010) this is important because customers evaluate a product through this first perception. In other words, to have the wrong person to endorse a product can mean losing potential customers if the person is perceived as having no product knowledge.

To buy a product or to see an advertisement, the perception of the endorser is important as we have seen previously. Product knowledge was the first point mentioned in our thesis, yet we will approach another point which is extremely important when someone tries to communicate about a good or a service, the credibility. It is not rare to see endorsers doing advertisements for a product or a service praise its advantages and values whereas we doubt it. This has been explained by Hovland and Weiss (1951) and their credibility model explanation which highlights that the credibility of the endorser (celebrity or influencer) has an impact on the statement effectiveness. Riedl and Von Luckwald (2019); Hovland and Weiss (1951) assume that the credibility of an endorser is based on two main elements. The first one is the expertise. Expertise reflects the knowledge, experience and abilities that a person has about a field. Hovland et al. (1974) add the talent a person has could also be a source of credibility. The second one is the trustworthiness which is determined and perceived by people through the honesty, the reliability and the seriousness of an endorser toward a product.

Ohanian (1991) The trustworthiness is highly correlated to the trust a consumer has towards the endorsers thanks to the honesty and objectivity information given. The credibility and trustworthiness are two important parameters to take into account at the moment to choose an endorser for a brands especially because according to a study driven by Raktham, Chaipooirutana and Combs (2017) the credibility of an endorser is highly and positively related to attitudes of consumers towards advertisement on social media. This positive connection between attitudes toward advertising and credibility could lead to an improvement of customers' relationship with the brand (Riedl & Von Luckwald, 2019). By being in step with the brand or the company the customer could as well have an higher intention to buy.

Moreover, about the perception of endorsers, we can say the micro influencer and macro influencer are not perceived in the same manner by people. In this sense we will use the approach of expertise an endorser can have about a field and product coming from this field. Usually, micro influencers focus on only one field (fitness, fashion, beauty products and so on.). They are a sort of expert in their domain since they are passionate or have a diploma about their field of influence. According to Alassani and Göretz (2019), micro-influencers are perceived as having credibility, relevance and topic experts. By being passionate about their field, people can trust more these micro-influencers since people think they are objective and honest about the information given. We could quote some french youtubers for example such as Nota bene (Youtuber in History) Eric Flag, (Youtuber expert in street workout and personal development) etc. Those are micro influencers and are using their passion and knowledge to inform people and influence them only on the topic they master.

Macro influencers are a bit more complicated to understand and the perception people have from them is tricky. In fact, because they are usually famous, different brands are contacting them to promote their products, sometimes goods are not even in the same fields and influencers are promoting a lot of goods and services in different areas which is perceived as a discredit of their expertises. According to Alassani and Göretz (2019) those influencers are more seen as compulsive posting people on social media and creating fake connections with people about updates.

Another theory about the endorser perception is the congruence and incongruence theory. This theory is based on the level of connection perceived between a brand and its message and an endorser. According to Kahle and Homer (1985), this theory means a brand message and an endorser should be congruent to have a higher persuasive efficiency. We could for example take a look with the brand called Nike which is a brand doing sport clothing, shoes and other sport related goods. This brand has many endorsers but the two most famous are Cristiano Ronaldo (football player) and Michael Jordan (retired basketball player). The message of the brand is in its slogan “Just do it” and Cristiano Ronaldo and Michael Jordan are perfectly fitting in this message since they have worked a lot to be at the top level, and to be according to some people the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time) of their respective sport.

According to Kamins and Gupta (1994) a lot of studies done to evaluate the congruence and incongruence effect have highlighted the positive effect between the congruence and the endorser credibility. In fact, a football player has a better credibility to promote football products than a singer, a singer has better credibility in the music industry than an actor etc. Misra and Beatty (1990) observed a better brand memorization when the brand and the endorser have a congruence together and Kamins (1990) assume a better attitude toward the advertisement done by the endorsers while Kahle and Homer (1985); Misra and Beatty (1990); Till and Busler (2000) announce that attitude toward the brand is also improved when a congruence is observed between brand and its endorser.

Nevertheless, two theories are facing. The one presented previously agreed to say that congruence is important in order to have a high credibility range for an endorser but some other researchers agree together to say the incongruence could have as well a potential effect on the message and its persuasive effect. Debevec and Lyer (1986) did a study highlighting the effect of incongruence between the endorser and the product. This study shows an incongruence could drive to a better persuasive effect of the advertisement message. As we know, women are usually endorsers for washing powders and in this study, it reveals the effect on purchase intention on washing powder when it is male endorser, the purchase intention was higher than when it was endorsed by a woman. Same phenomenon about the beers which is a product defined

as more masculine by the study. A female endorser had more effect than a male endorser.

Petty et al. (1983) have also highlighted this phenomenon through their theory of the dual information process which shows as the result that an incongruence situation between the product and its endorsers can have a positive effect on people watching this advertisement if the person watching it is thinking about the meaning of the connection between the endorser and the product. According to this study, an incongruent advertisement should make people think about the meaning of it to have a positive effect. Fleck, Korchia and Luchez (2006) describe the same process, people facing an incongruent advertisement could be more stimulated to process the advertisement message. A small level of incongruence could lead as well to a better perception of the advertisement and the brand image. Nonetheless, according to Jaoued-Abassi and Chandon (2007) and the attribution theory, the incongruence might lead people to think the endorser is doing the advertisement only for financial reasons since they cannot see the connection between the endorser and the brand message. The congruence and incongruence could have an impact on the credibility and the trustworthiness of the endorser.

To complete the credibility study, Ohanian (1990) developed a scale to grade the credibility of an endorser. On this scale we can find the attractiveness and it is the third criterion of that method. Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon (2001) add to this theory the product attractiveness component which is referring to the aesthetic of the product such as what people can see (color, shape etc.) which is also related to the purchase intention, more a product is aesthetically good, more the purchase intention is high. We will focus on the attractiveness model related to the endorser since we are writing about endorsement. McGuire (1985) argues that the testimonial of a product (beauty product) is determined according to the beauty of its endorsers (attractiveness model). In fact, people based their judgment on some physical characteristics they have seen on the endorsers but also on the similarities they find between the endorser and themselves. An advertisement for a product which is treating pimples or spots will create a higher customer relationship (purchase intention) if the person watching the advertisement identifies himself as the endorser. Erdogan (1999) assumes that celebrities are endorsers because they are famous but not only, their beauty could be

also a reason why a brand chooses them to represent their products especially if the product promoted is a good destined to increase the physical beauty. Kahle and Homer (1985); Erdogan (1999), highlight as well there is a better brand memorization, a higher purchase intention Debevec and Kernan (1984); Friedman and Friedman (1979) and a better attitude towards the product when people are seeing an attractive celebrity or influencer in the advertisement. This improvement of the customer relationship is showing the importance of the use of an attractive endorser for an advertisement. This attractiveness is however dependent on the product endorsed. According to Kamins (1990), if the advertisement or publicity is done to promote a beauty product there will be a positive effect to the use of an attractive endorser on the audience. As well as, their study shows no correlation between the beauty of an endorser and products which are not destined to a beauty effect such as computers for example. Trivedi (2018) agrees with the previous theory explaining that attractiveness of the celebrity or influencer is important in the fashion industry and Trivedi and Sama (2020) publish their study saying the expertise of an endorser is even more important than to have a celebrity endorser in the electronics products marketing. According to those theories the attractiveness of an endorser is then only important for industry promoting goods or services about aesthetics.

Finally, the perception of influencers or celebrities can be also seen as negative when some factors are identified as wrong by the consumer. For example if an influencer is promoting a brand they have criticized earlier, the credibility of the influencer is going down. The same happens according to Woodroof, Howie, Syrdal and VanMeter (2020) if customers would not expect this association or if financial arrangements are hidden in order to not disclose their contracts. Customers are not interpreting by the same manner when there is a financial relationship between a product promoted and an influencer, especially if this relation is hidden. It could affect the trustworthiness of the influencer and have bad repercussions on the brand. De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) assume as well the efficacy of endorsers is depending on the product promoted. A good endorser for basketball goods might be the wrong one to promote music industry or other sports goods.

Besides, it seems that the number of products endorsed by a celebrity or an influencer can also influence the perception people have. Tripp, Jensen and Carlson (1994) define



a limit of four products to be endorsed before the credibility and trustworthiness start to decrease. Weiner (1985) goes further by saying the multiple product endorsement could create interferences in the perception people have about an endorser. This could directly affect the influencer' credibility or likability. The credibility of the endorser could fall since people could believe the financial aspect is the first reason for this influencer to accept a multiple endorsement. Multiple endorsement could even not be the only reason, according to Tripp, Jensen and Carlson (1994) the number of exposure a person has with an endorser in its day (seen many times the same person promoting different products) could negatively impact the purchase intention, the attitudes towards brands and even the attitude towards the advertisement. The fact it is impossible to distinguish the influencer with a brand is blurring the nature of the endorsement and might result in the perception that the person has been chosen for their name and not to fit with the product.

For our study, we obtain different hypotheses we need to check in our next part. Hypothesis 3 (H3): A person promoting a good related to its work has higher knowledge and credibility about it.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The congruence has a better effect on relationship marketing (customer relationships).

Hypothesis 5 (H5): A person promoting many different products is less persuasive than a person promoting only one or a few product.

## **4 THE METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 The sample**

Our methodology is based on the analysis of a survey done by ourselves. The survey consists of 16 questions including 15 questions with predetermined answers (quantitative approach) and one question consisting of a little essay where people can write their thoughts (qualitative approach). To have a representative sample we wanted to get 100 answers from people of different generations. The difference of generation was really important in order to have a representative sample.

### **4.2 The spread of the survey**

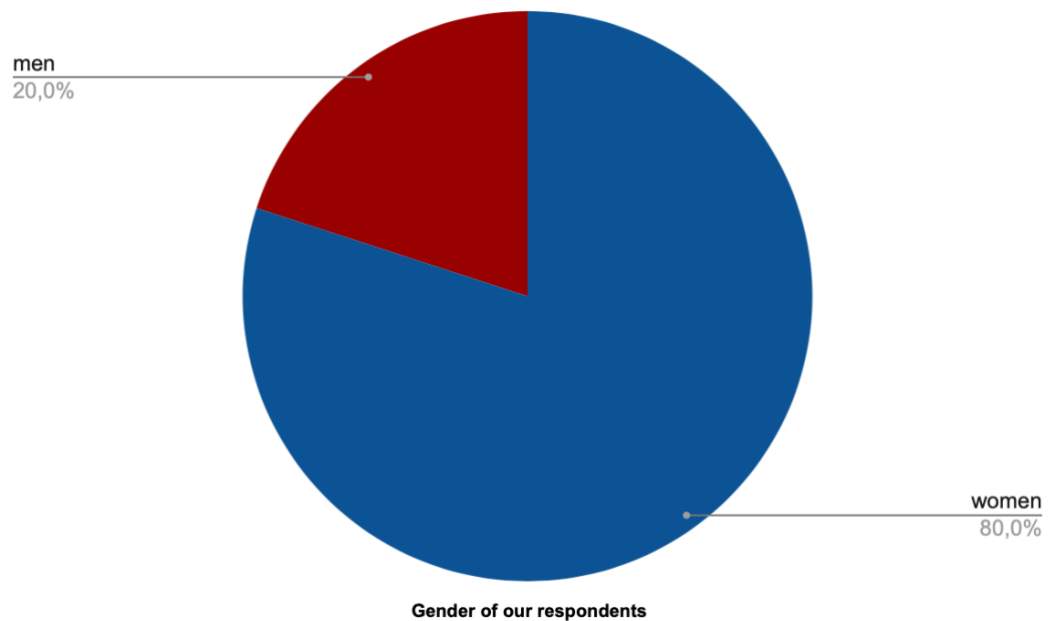
In order to succeed in touching as many people as we can, we have done this survey in French because we have a broad network there. This language was expected to help us to reach at least 100 people. To do so, we decided to spread the survey through social media and as our family to help us to share. Social media choose to share this study has been Instagram, Facebook, the message app WhatsApp have been used.

By using those social media platforms to share the survey, we were expecting to get a lot of reshared through our network, and that happened. Thanks to that, we believe it was a good strategy to spread it through our network this way.

### **4.3 Sample analysis**

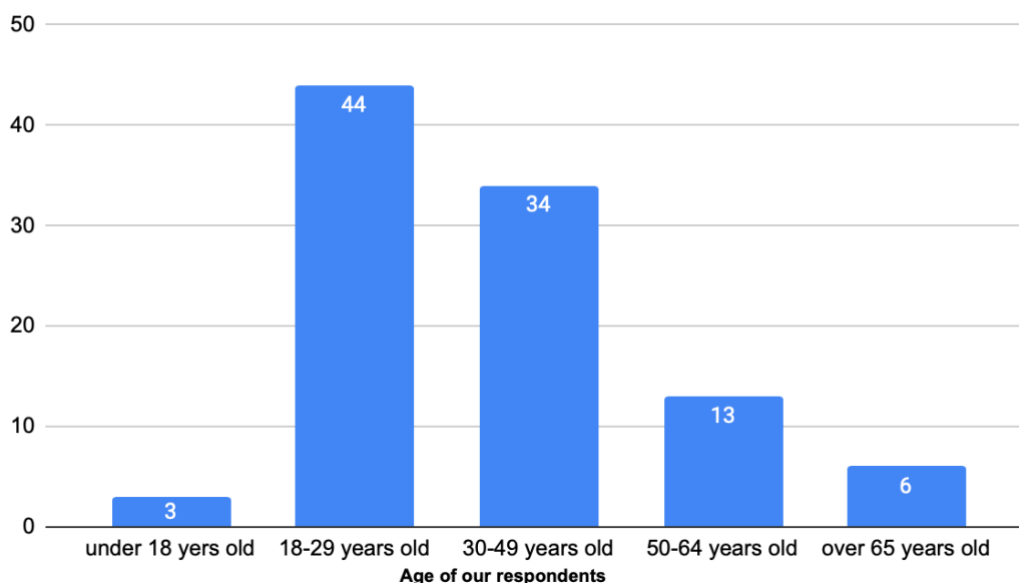
Our sample reveals and confirms some studies such as the study from Pew research center driven by Auxier and Anderson (2021) revealing that 77% of women are using Facebook compared to 61% of men. In fact, we got the majority of our answers from the social media named Facebook. We can see that our study confirms that this social media is more used by women at this point since we have 80% of our respondents who are women. We can link to our reshared success since our reshared have been done only by women. However, we aim to think our respondents are still representative of the society even if the parity is not respected because we got respondents from all generations.

**Figure 1: Gender of our respondents**



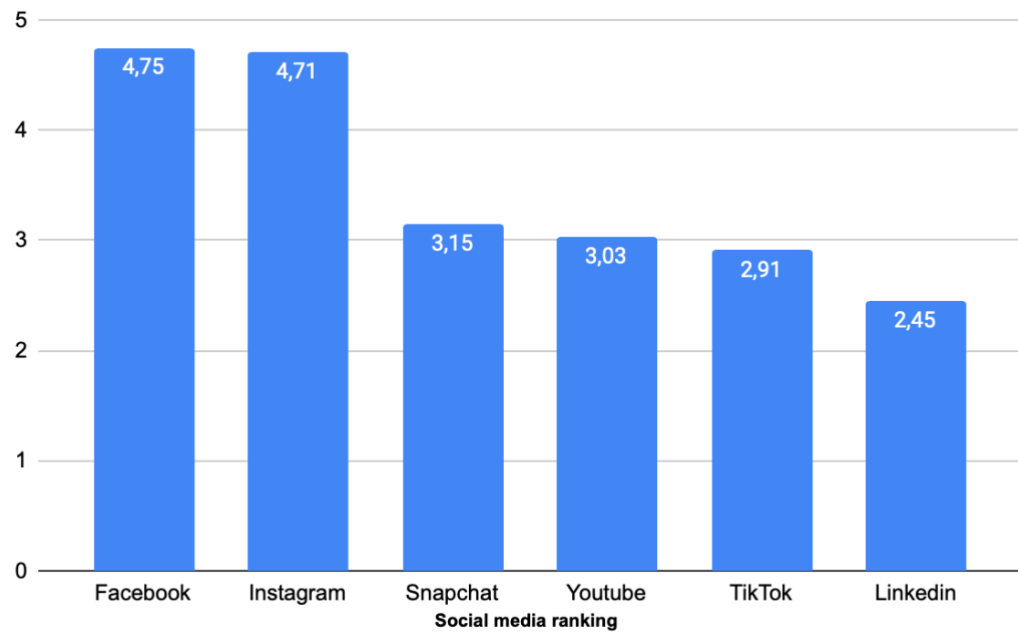
The second important indicator is the age of our sample. As we were saying we were trying to get it as much as possible representative of generations and this is what happens during our study. We can see that generations are represented more or less well through our respondents' ages. Brosdahl and Carpenter (2011) generation's classification have been used for our study and we can see that it is matching with our results. We can confirm the results from Perrin (2015) saying that young adults are the most users of social media platforms followed by their older generation from the generation Y.

**Figure 2: The age of our respondents**



Finally, the last important indicator coming from our respondents is their use of social media platforms. As we were highlighting previously, the use of social media depends on the generation. According to Fietkiewicz, Lins, Baran and Stock (2016), generation Y was using Facebook, Instagram and snapchat as main social media. Result confirmed as well by Auxier and Anderson (2021); PrakashYadav and Rai (2017) who were adding TikTok as a new trend in social media which is also confirmed by our study since around 58% of people are ranking it in the fifth place. The podium of the ranking from our survey confirmed the previous observations saying that Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat are the most used social media.

***Figure 3: Social media ranking***



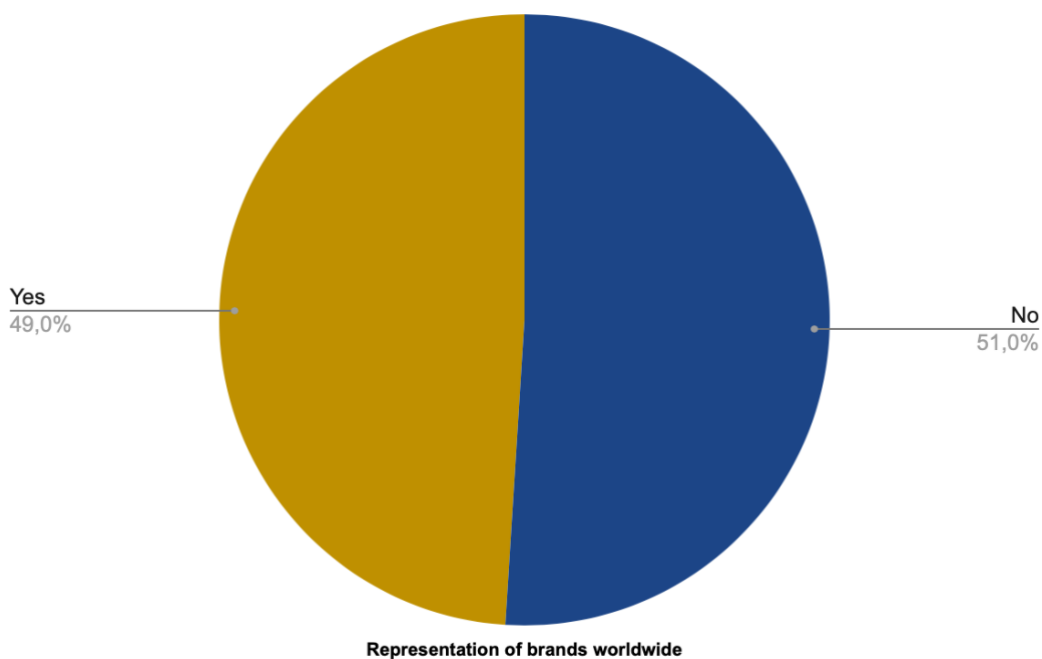
## 5 ANALYZING THE RESULT RELATED TO OUR HYPOTHESIS

Our hypothesis 1 (H1) : Influencers with a high number of followers have more impact on the purchase intention.

Our first hypothesis is directly linked to the number of followers an influencer has. This hypothesis is strongly related to hypothesis 2 and the credibility concept.

However, we do have a question in our survey to check people's opinion about influencers and especially to know if it was essential in consumer brands to have an influencer representing a brand. The question was “*Do you think brands need influencers or celebrities to represent them worldwide?*”. The result obtained through this question is a bit surprising since there is no major difference between the two categories. In fact, 51% of people think influencers are not necessary and 49% of people think they are. Number of followers influencers have does not mean that much in this context since even their importance is challenged.

**Figure 4: Do you think brands need influencers or celebrities to represent them worldwide?**

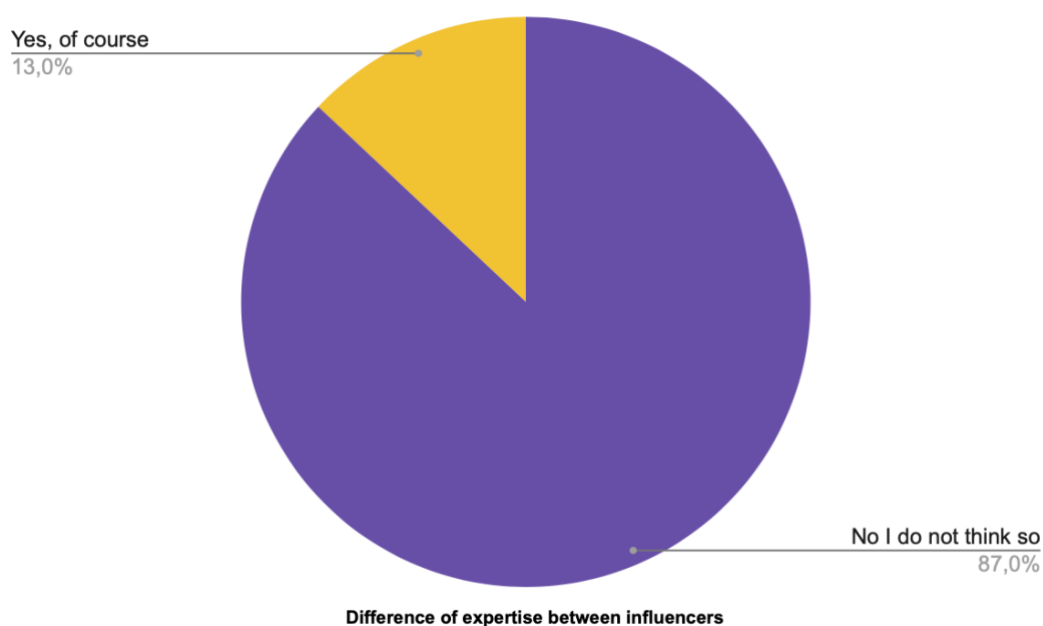


Hypothesis 2 (H2): Influencers with a small number of followers are experts on their topic and closer to their community than an influencer with a high number of followers.

To set this hypothesis we based our thought on the work from Alassani and Göretz (2019) arguing that micro influencers seem to have a better credibility and appear as topic experts in their research. However, our study revealed that people are not really believing it. To the question “*Do you think there is a difference in the expertise between a big influencer (over 100 000 followers) and a small influencer (under 100 000 followers)?*” Most people confirmed they were not making any differences. In fact, our survey highlights that 87% of our respondents think there is no difference of expertise between a big and small influencer. We think this represents the opinion of people quite precisely. It is also making sense since considering the number of followers of an influencer represents his/her knowledge would be a reductive analysis of their potential and global knowledge.

Below the graph representing the allocation of answers and their percentages.

**Figure 5: Do you think there is a difference in the expertise between a big influencer (over 100 000 followers) and a small influencer (under 100 000 followers)?**



Nevertheless, to complete our first question we assume there could be some extreme cases where a difference is possible. To follow this idea, we asked a non mandatory question about the differences “*If yes, which one is the most expert?*” and our respondents have confirmed this time, the results highlighted by the study from Alassani and Göretz (2019). 62% of our respondents confirm that the smaller influencer would appear as the most expert in this case. We could explain this result and correlate it with hypothesis 3. Usually small influencers focus on their predilection topic which is giving them more credibility than bigger influencers who have already fame and are getting diverse partnerships with diverse companies which might not represent their “special” knowledge anymore.

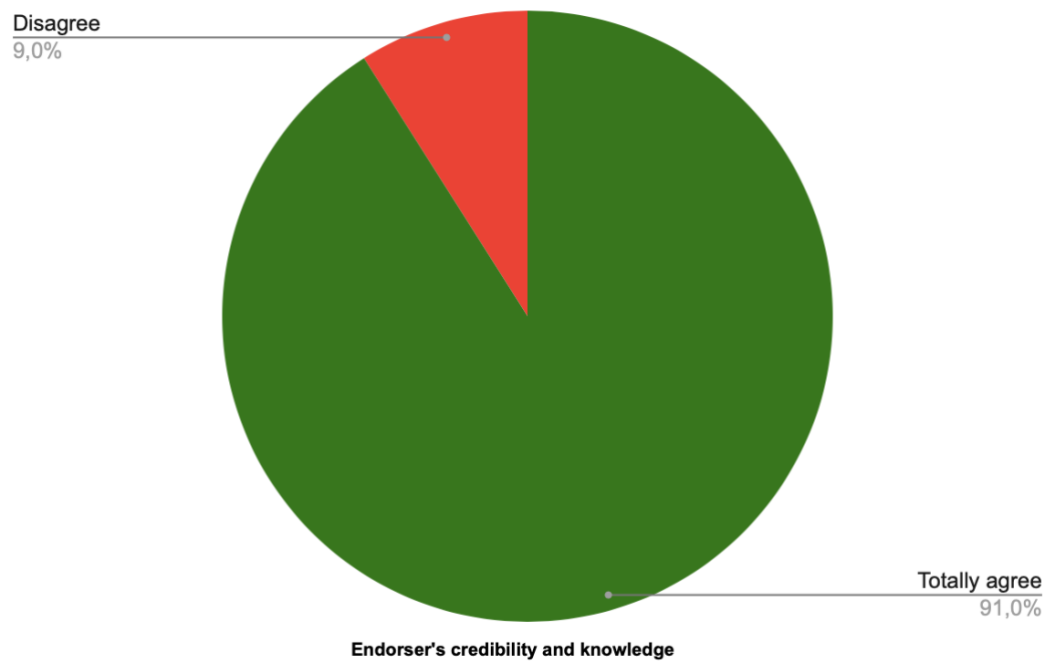
(H3): A person promoting a good related to its work has higher knowledge and credibility about it.

To verify our third hypothesis based on the studies of Kamins (1990); Trivedi and Sama (2020), saying that credibility and knowledge about a product is stronger when promoted by a person working in the same field than the product in question. We needed to create a question which is the clearest as possible. Our question was “*Do you think a person promoting a good related to his work has higher knowledge and credibility about it? For example, is a computer seller more credible to sell a computer than a football player?*”.

To answer this question two answers were available, “*Yes I do*” or “*No, I Don’t think so*”. People have considerably approved the theory. 91% of our respondents totally agree with that. We believe this is because of the link perceived by customers in society. Usually, people in their daily life tend to ask advice to people who have experience and/or are working in a company related to a product. Those people are seen as more capable and expert in their topic. It seems as well to be more truthful thanks to their legitimacy to talk or give advice about a product. The legitimacy is an important factor of the credibility and underestimate in the research paper.

***Figure 6: Do you think a person promoting a good related to his work has higher knowledge and credibility about it? For example, is a computer seller more credible to sell a computer than a football player?***





Hypothesis 4 (H4): The congruence has a better effect on relationship marketing (customer relationships).

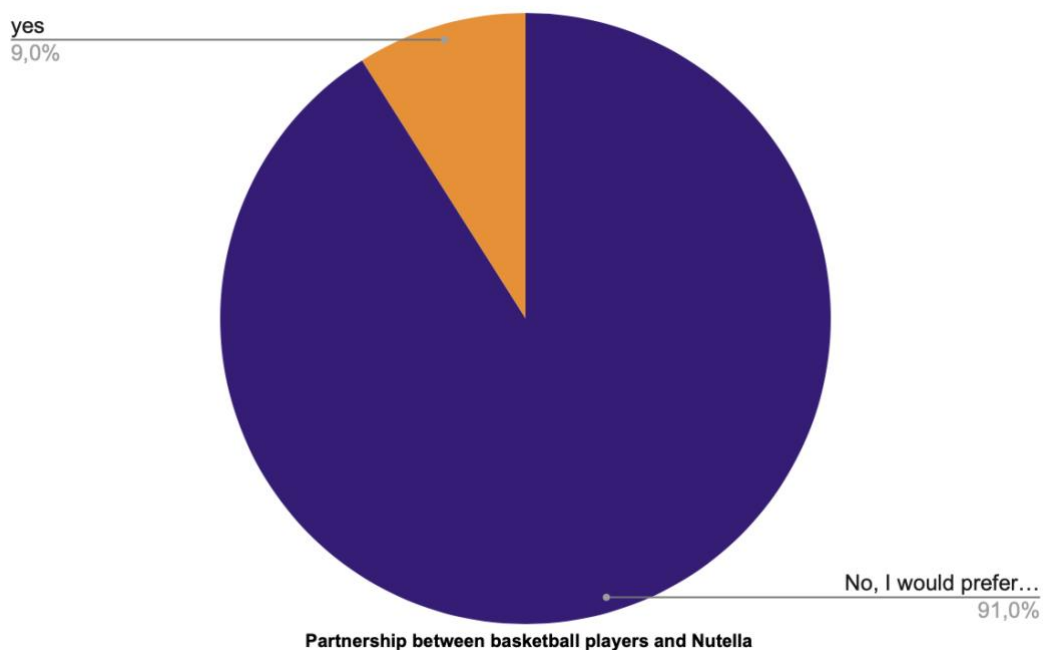
The fourth hypothesis was about the congruence and incongruence theories. Those two theories are really important in relational marketing since they are correlated to credibility, and globally to the perception of customers. According to Kamins and Gupta (1994); Kamins (1990); Kahle and Homer (1985); Misra and Beatty (1990); Till and Busler (2000) the congruency was having a positive impact on customers since it supposed to enhance brand memorization, customer attitude towards brand and having a better persuasive impact. However as seen earlier in the report, this theory is facing the Incongruence theory from Debevec and Lyer (1986); Petty et al. (1983); Fleck, Korchia and Luchez (2006) which is highlighting that a certain level of incongruence could improve the advertisement message process by customers but also have a better persuasive effect on customer mind.

To check this hypothesis we were using some advertisement campaigns which are categorized as congruent and incongruent. The first one was the campaign from Nutella using Kobe Bryant (basketball player) as endorser highlighted by the figure 1. The second one was a campaign from Nike with Cristiano Ronald (football player) as

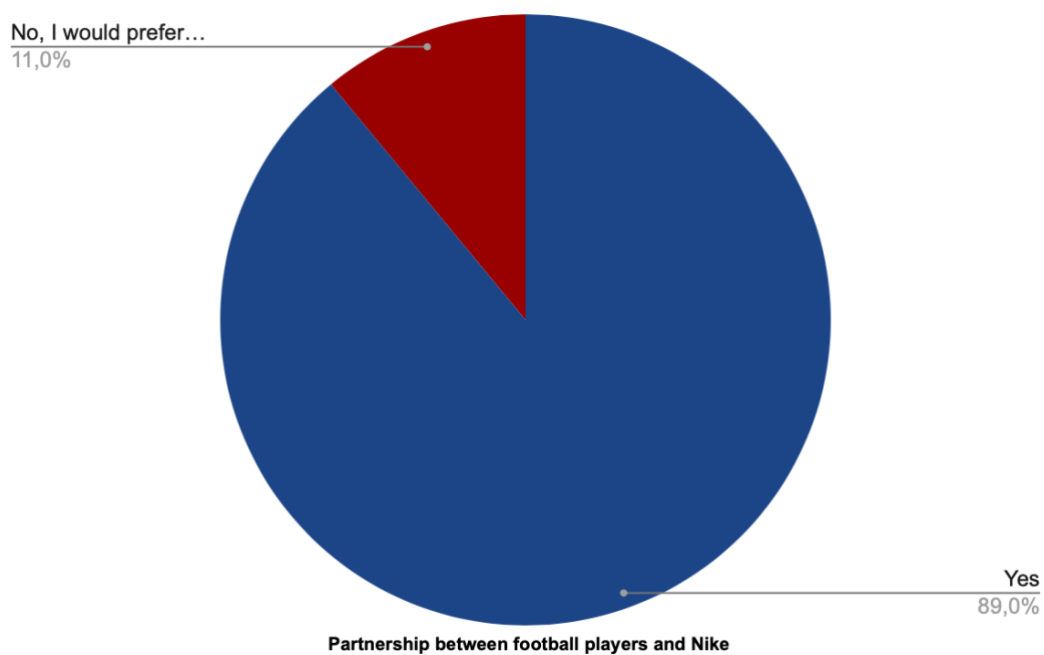
endorser represented in the figure 2 and the last one was a campaign done with Justin Bieber (singer) and Nicole (cosmetic brand) represented in the figure 3.

Our results are unambiguous, people prefer the congruence between an endorser and its endorsement. As the figure 2 highlights, Nike's campaign was really well represented by Cristiano Ronaldo. It means people like the credibility of this endorser and its link with the brand. However, those other campaigns from Nutella and Nicole have been perceived as incongruent and people did not like it. Nevertheless, we can see in figure 3 that Justin Bieber represents the cosmetic brand for 21% of people, which is sensitively higher than Nutella's campaign. We could explain it by the fact that singers are using makeup and cosmetics to go on stages, in TV shows but also in their video clip so people might perceive a connection between the brand and the endorser.

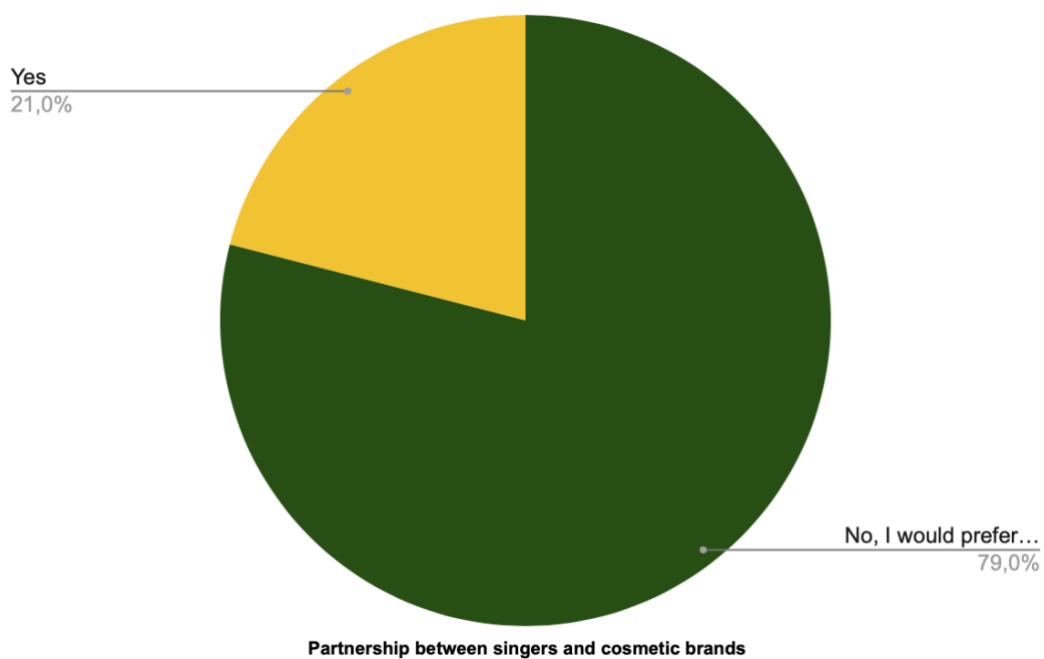
**Figure 7: Do you think basketball players are the best celebrities to represent Nutella?**



**Figure 8: Do you think football players are the best celebrities to represent Nike' football products?**



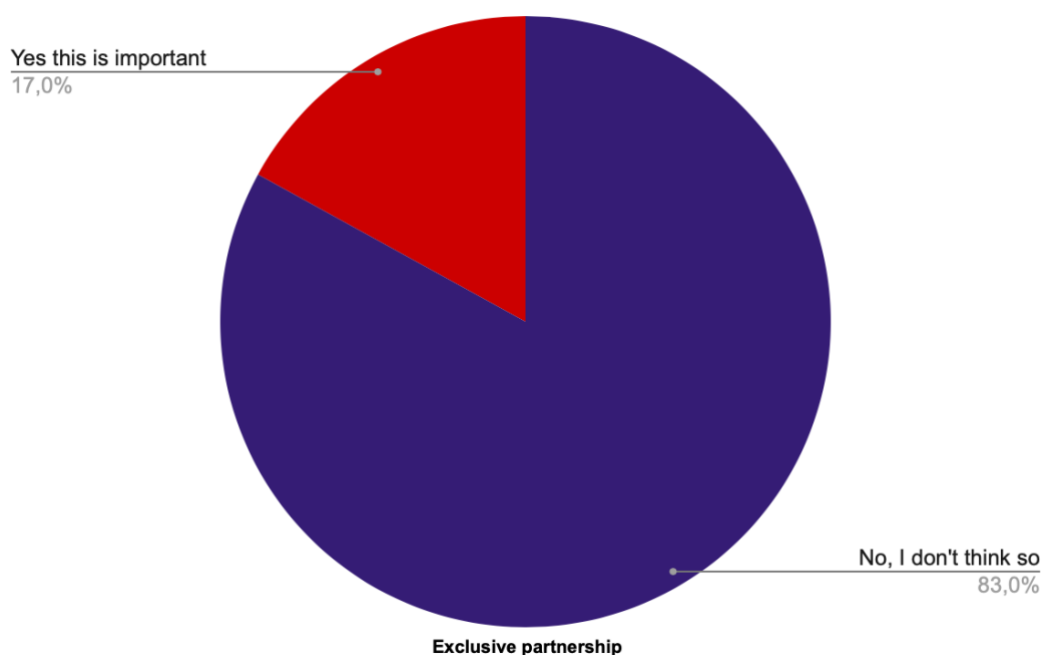
*Figure 9: Do you think singers are the best celebrities to represent Makeup products?*



Hypothesis 5 (H5): A person promoting many different products is less persuasive than a person promoting only one or a few product.

To check our last hypothesis which is based on theories from Weiner (1985) and Tripp; Jensen and Carlson (1994) arguing that multiple brand endorsements done by the same endorser could interfere with the perception people have of this endorser and could impact the brand image negatively. We used the following question “*Do you think it is important to have an influencer dedicated to a brand or it does not matter for you? (exclusive partnership)*”. Through the result of this question we can say that people do not really care about it and it seems to not impact them. In fact, only 17% of people think it is important to have an exclusive partnership between a brand and the endorser. This might be a consequence of advertisement exposure. The advertisement exposure does not cease to increase over time and generations are getting used to it. It could probably impact the people' perception of endorsement which is making it common. This might explain the fact that only a few people replied positively to this question.

**Figure 10: Do you think it is important to have an influencer dedicated to a brand or it does not matter for you? (exclusive partnership)**



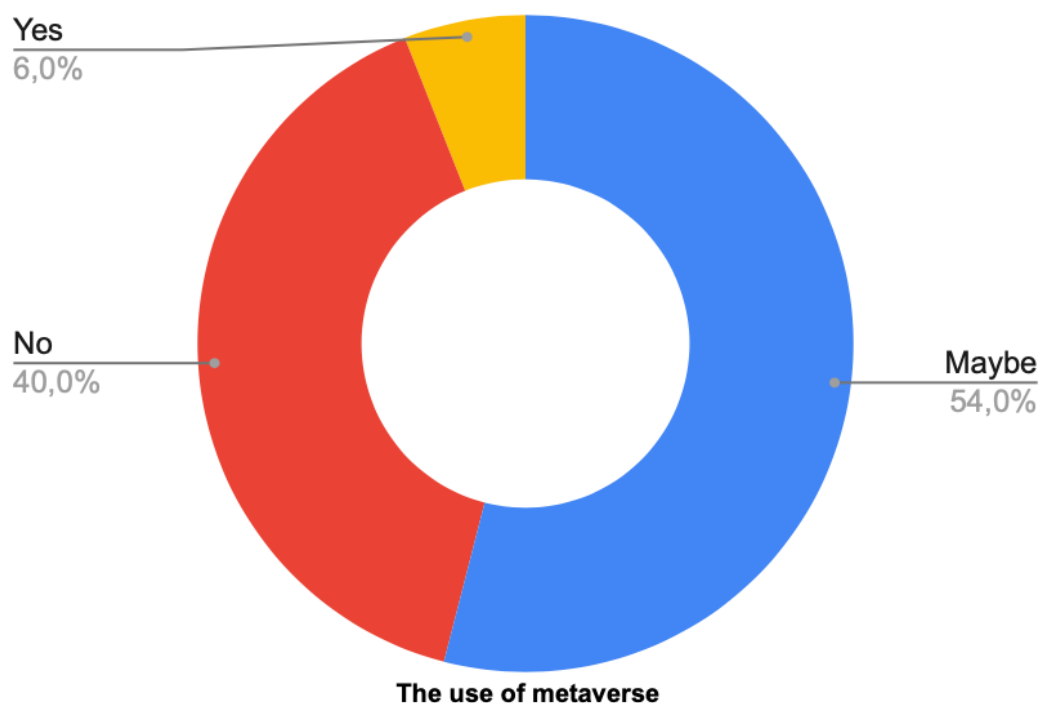
Finally, in our survey we included some other questions which were not directly related to our five hypotheses. Nevertheless, those could bring some added value for brands for any future development of relation marketing. Four questions that were

supposed to be not related included three questions with quantitative answers and one question with qualitative reply.

The three first questions are about the future of relation marketing through new digital tools such as immersive technologies (metaverse, virtual reality, augmented reality etc.) Those three questions were basically asking people if they would be ready to use those new technologies right now and in the near future. Answers are interesting, they are highlighting that a change is coming. For a year now, we have all heard about the metaverse but the concept remains blurry and people do not really know what to think about it. Our results reflect that uncertainty.

Our first question was about whether to be ready or not for the use of metaverse in a purchase case.

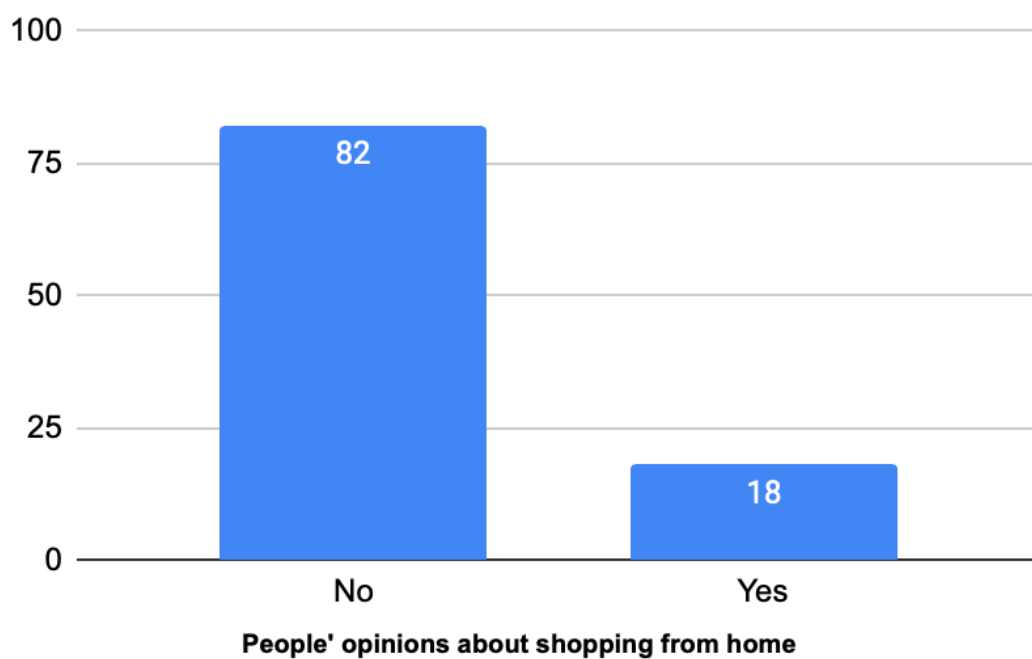
**Figure 11: Would you be ready to use the metaverse (digital world where you are represented by an avatar) to do your shopping?**



In fact, it seems that most of the people 60% of them could be ready or are ready for it, however, 54% are waiting to see how it would be done. They are waiting to see the

interface, the platform and especially the services proposed there. As we were saying, the concept of metaverse is one of the blurriest concepts we got about the potential future of technologies since no one really knows how it could be. Nonetheless, our second question comes out from the metaverse. In fact with metaverse, people will do all their purchases from home and we asked people if they were ready for this change, most of them are not as you can see below.

**Figure 12: Do you like the idea to not have to move from your home to do your shopping? (food, clothes, accessories etc.)**

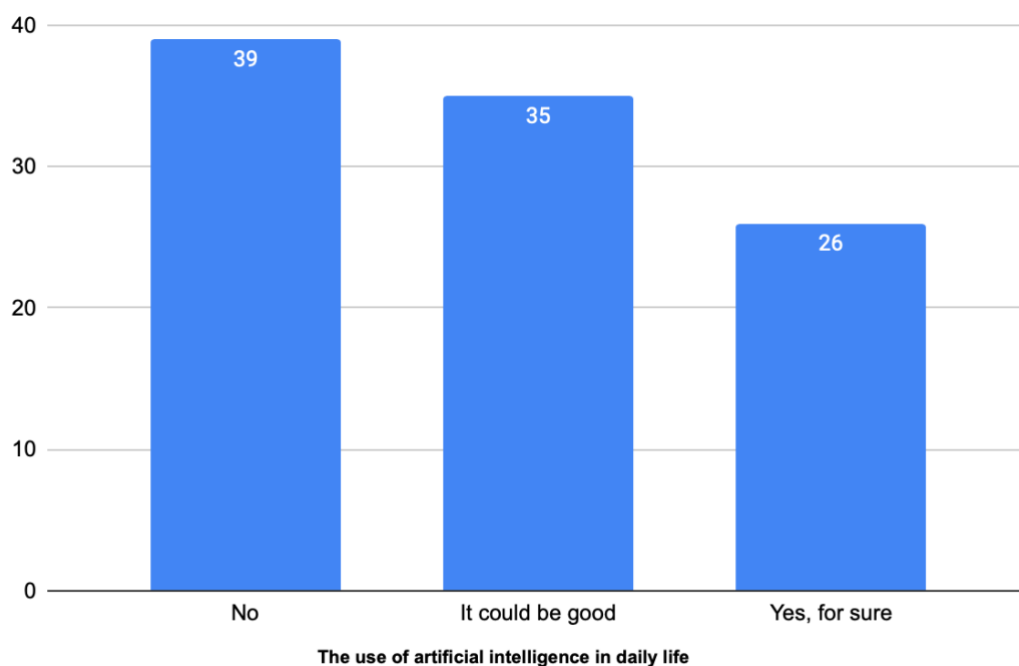


A huge majority is against the idea of doing every purchase from home, people need to go outside and even if the delivery services are growing, people still need for some product to go directly to the shop to choose. In this answer, we think there might be a psychological dimension which appeared because of covid 19. People were in lock out for many months and it has been horrible for most of them. One of the purposes of human society is to have social contact and we think people are afraid to lose it through the metaverse.

Our last question about the technology was about artificial intelligence and its use by customers. We were asking if people would be ready to use artificial intelligence (such

as intelligent mirrors and so on) during their shopping. In this case, replies are really split and could refer to an easier implementation of this technology by brands in their shop. 39% of our respondents are against this idea but 61% are for or think it could be good. This technology might be the easiest one to implement in shops at the moment since customers are already exposed to this technology in their daily life. Some customers could be also afraid of the veracity of this mirror but if they get to try it with the help of the brand crew, they could change their mind.

**Figure 13: Would you like to use Artificial intelligence such as robots or intelligent mirrors to help you during your shopping? Intelligent mirror is a mirror which is showing clothes on you when you go front of it (you don't need to try them physically anymore)**

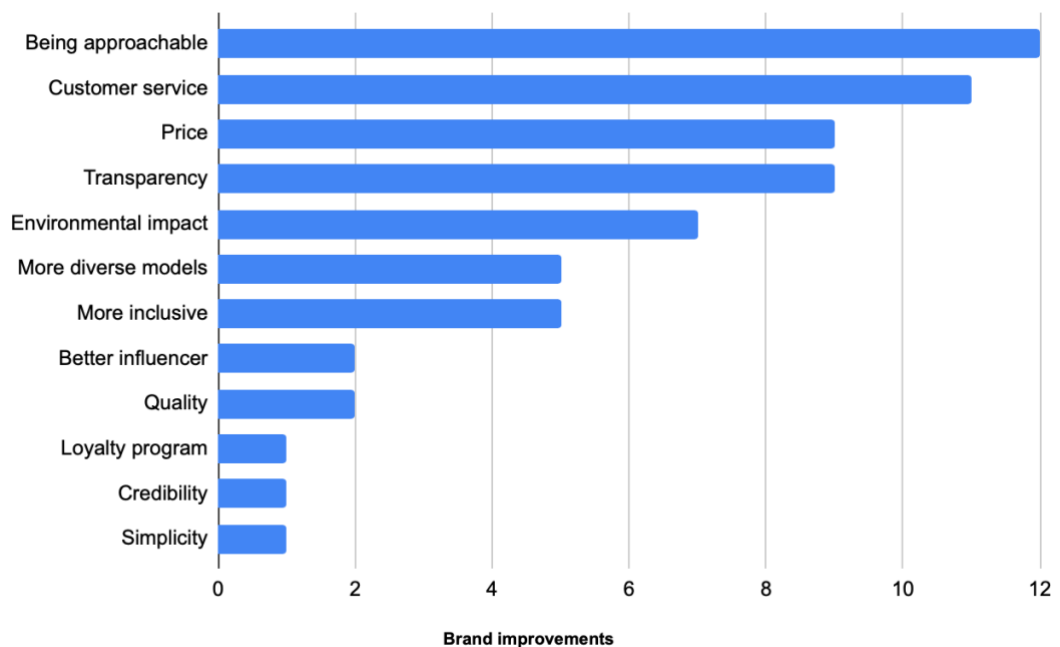


The qualitative answers were also appreciated in our survey since we wanted to give a possibility to our respondents to give their opinion about what brands should improve to have a better relationship with their customers. In this question, 45 % of our respondents did not take the time to reply, however, we believe the result is highlighting the main concerns about brands and their improvement.

As we can see in our results below, four criteria stand out from the crowd such as the price, the customer service, the transparency and being approachable. Those four criteria are the main improvements brands should follow according to our respondents. They should decrease their prices since our respondents think brands are too expensive and should stop seeking only profit. They should also improve their customer services by having people who are enjoying their work, who are nice and polite. Improve their transparency about their raw materials, their environmental impact and so on. Then, brands should improve their approachability as well since our respondents think brands are too difficult to contact, they don't really care about customer's opinions and seem to just have superficial relations with their clients.

Directly related to our topic, we can highlight that people would prefer better influencers which means more concern about brands and more diverse models which means some models representing the diversity of the society in its different layers.

**Figure 14: We would like to hear your opinion. What should brands do in order to improve their relationship with their clients?**





## 6 CONCLUSION

To conclude, we would like to highlight that considering the number of social media available worldwide now, businesses should target the one involving their own customers to build a strong customer-brand relationship (Fietkiewicz, Lins, Baran & Stock, 2016).

Relationship marketing is a broad topic which has been studied a lot earlier. However, some gray areas remain. We define a topic which is The relation marketing through the era of digitalisation : social media and endorsement strategy. With this study we were trying to clear a first gray area about digital strategy with influencers. Influencer became more and more popular through years and have been more often used by brands in order to promote their products. Nevertheless, our study aims to provide help to state a clear digital strategy by checking and updating previous theories.

In order to give an answer to our topic, we defined in our research paper five hypotheses representing the five main conclusions from previous theories. We do know now which theories remain true, and which one is not really in use anymore.

We confirm congruence theorems from Kamins and Gupta (1994); Kamins (1990); Kahle and Homer (1985); Misra and Beatty (1990); Till and Busler (2000) which seem to have a better impact on people's minds. Our sample was reacting well to the congruence stimulus whereas incongruent stimuluses were not effective. Our survey confirms hypothesis 3 from theories according to the studies of Kamins (1990); Trivedi and Sama (2020) which was about the perception of credibility by people. It confirms that someone working in the same field than the product endorsed seems to have more expertise and be more credible. We believe these two theories (congruence and credibility) are linked since the congruence is influencing the credibility of an endorsement. Those two results are correlated and tend to fluctuate in the same way.

We refuted two theories which are represented by hypothesis 5 and hypothesis 1. It seems to not have any impact on our sample to have an endorser with multiple endorsements as Weiner (1985) and Tripp; Jensen and Carlson (1994) were arguing. In fact, we are explaining this result since people are more and more exposed to

advertisements. In their daily life people are exposed almost everywhere to advertisements and it might have decreased their attention about who is promoting what and have also decreased the effect of the advertisement message on them. The second theory we refuted is about the number of followers an influencer has. It does not seem to have an impact as our hypothesis 1 and 2 are showing. As hypothesis 1 and 2 are extremely correlated, the results for both of them are negative. In fact, there is no positive impact on purchase intention and there is no impact on the perception of small and big influencers. The only impact it has is if an advertisement seems suspicious, people tend to believe more a small influencer. Alassani and Göretz (2019) seem to be right in case of suspicious advertisement otherwise their theory does not apply.

Moreover, our survey revealed an interesting fact: 51% of our respondents think brands do not need to have an endorser to represent them worldwide. This is a huge fact since brands always wanted someone to represent them and thought that it was imperative to have endorsers. However, if 51% do not care about the endorsement 49% do care.

Besides, our study highlights some changes needed by brands. These changes could be implemented quickly because they are based on customers or parameters the brand is totally controlling. Our respondents highlight that prices, customer service, transparency and the approachability of the brands should be improved. In fact, they are not satisfied with it and would like to have an improvement on it. Managers should also be careful about the influencer chosen. If some of them are really good and represent the brand well, some do not have the credibility to do so, and that will negatively impact the brand. The credibility and congruence between the endorser and the brand are the two criteria which have been approved by our respondents and by previous theories. We encourage the different actors in brands to take into consideration those elements to improve their relation with their customers.

Our sample is well representative of people active in their daily life on social media. Our respondents are highlighting numerous studies and their findings and most importantly, we succeeded in having a sample with all the generations represented. This is a good achievement. To do our survey, we were using a tool specialized in

survey and poll questionnaires and this is what guarantees the smooth running of our study. The number of respondents (hundred people) was also important for us since we were looking to have a good amount of people to be sure to have representative answers.

However, if we are sure of the validity of our research, we are also seeing some limitations for our study. The first one is because we were not able to run it internationally as expected. Our data is coming only from France and that could be a limitation to have a perfect representation of customers worldwide. In the future, we hope this research could be done at a different scale such as European or internationally. By compiling data coming from different countries we could provide research able to guide companies and brands according to the country they are entering. This means as well to have a bigger number of respondents such as over two or three thousand of respondents for a European scale.

We could also improve this research by having some interviews with brands and endorsers to see how they interact together and how they feel about those facts. We could bring the results and these actors face to face to see how they can explain it and see if our results are in accordance with what companies try to do. However, we also believe it is important to think about the future of relation marketing and this is why, for the future, we could set a research agenda for relation marketing. Since we have updated and checked previous theories to confirm their veracity, we would like to suggest next research on the future of relation marketing. We identified a few new technologies which could be the possible next milestone of relation marketing but still need some research to see how to implement them in a context of relation marketing. In the next few pages is our opening on the future topic of research suggested previously.

## **7 OPENING ON THE FUTURE OF RELATION MARKETING**

The relation marketing will for sure continue to evolve through the years. Technologies and the needs of people will evolve in a certain manner which could allow brands to use technologies which are nowadays in development. In this part, we will try to draw the future of relationship marketing through some technologies which could be emerging in a few years or totally improved. This part is totally based on scientific work and is only a draft of what could be the next topic of relation marketing research.

According to our opinion and research papers, artificial intelligence and immersive technologies such as the virtual world, the metaverse and augmented reality seem to be the future of customer and brand relations. Those technologies could be used in different places such as retailers, from home etc. and could improve the experience of consumers while being a challenge for brands since customers might not be ready for these changes yet.

### **7.1 Immersive technologies**

In the future, what we can be sure of is that technologies will continue to evolve and be more and more invasive. In fact, nowadays people are already extremely connected thanks to their smartphone, laptop, watch etc. but in tomorrow's world, the way to be connected will change a little bit. At the moment, we are only connected thanks to our electronic devices, feeling basic experiences through websites, videos and chats. However, in the near future people and brands could be connected together in a 3D world called virtual world and metaverse or by augmented reality. According to Bian, Leng and Zhao (2022), metaverse will be the next milestone reached by IT industry and then be the next evolution of technology. The concept of virtual world and metaverse can be a bit difficult to get, but we can define them as follows.

Virtual world: “Synthetic, persistent, immersive and networked multi-users environments, allowing users represented as avatars to interact with other users and in-world content in (nearly) realtime” (Shen et al., 2020).

Metaverse: “Metaverse is an immersive virtual world where people interact as avatars with other individuals and organizations, using the metaphor of the real world but without its physical limitations” (Bian, Leng, & Zhao, 2022).

To not get confused, metaverse and virtual world are exactly the same since metaverse is a virtual world where people can interact together. We can obviously believe that the metaverse or virtual world (depending on how people prefer to call it) will be the future of relation marketing. According to Bian, Leng and Zhao (2022) the metaverse has been evolving a lot. Through this evolution it got a good position to be the next digital platform for interaction and especially commercial one. Moreover, another study which is a bit more general confirms this approach. The study driven by Scholz and Duffy (2018) states that the range of immersive technologies which include Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), metaverse and so on are offering and will offer some unique marketing opportunities.

To highlight unique marketing opportunities we can go further and imagine the future. In the future people would be doing their shopping though the metaverse by using a virtual reality headset. In this world the avatar would go to a shop and do shopping there. The user does not need anymore to be there factually but only in the virtual world. The shop adjustments could be personalized according to each user. It means some product could be in some special positions etc. According to Elboudali et al. (2020), the virtual world will be good for that since the solution proposed by each shop could have a personalized design thanks to the consumer behavior analysis (shop design for example).

Furthermore, the experience of a purchase could be as well different. We could imagine a low immersion in VR at the moment to go to buy a car. In this case the customer remains going to the car dealership to buy a vehicle. In this case, the client could be interested in buying a car and at the traditional moment of the car try, the seller is coming with a virtual reality headset and you are trying the car in the virtual world. Protopsaltou et al. (2002) believe it would be possible. For them virtual reality is more interactive and realistic than pictures of websites.

Besides, we could also imagine another type of product which could be presented in a sort of virtual experience through augmented reality. This product could appear in the user's surrounding environment. The best example of this technology is the game Pokemon Go which is using the AR at the moment to catch a Pokemon. You can see through your phone the pokemon appearing in your environment and then try to catch it. Beck and Crie (2018) argue that with augmented reality, it would be possible to enhance the product experience since customers could see it in their surrounding environment. For example, consumers could use it to see if a sofa is fitting well in their home, if a tv could be well on a wall and so on. Customers would already have a good idea of how a good could be included in their environment.

However, the question of relation marketing will remain important. Building a good relationship with customers through metaverse will be essential and according to Jeon (2021) it could even have an impact on companies' survival.

## 7.2 Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is already nowadays included in our life, however, the future of relation marketing includes for sure this artificial intelligence through other new technologies. Artificial intelligence is a term which is often used, nevertheless, it is still a bit blurry, a lot of people are not exactly knowing what it is and we can even hear some people using this term wrongly.

To be sure about what we are talking about, we need to define it. According to a definition from McCarthy (2004) and used as well by the company IBM, we can define artificial intelligence as follows: "*It is the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs. It is related to the similar task of using computers to understand human intelligence, but AI does not have to confine itself to methods that are biologically observable.*"

We can complete this definition by a complement which is a bit more precise as Paschen, Kietzmann and Kietzmann (2019) "*AI differs from human intelligence in that it is based on the rapid processing of data. In AI, intelligence may be generally defined*

*as the ability to process and transform data into information to inform goal-directed behaviour”.*

As we were saying, the future of relation marketing will certainly use new technologies and put them in the spotlight, however, new technologies could not do anything without artificial intelligence. In fact, we were talking previously about the immersive technologies, and most of them will be based on artificial intelligence. Metaverse for example and virtual reality, will use artificial intelligence to work well and meet the client's expectations. Ameen, Tarhini, Reppel and Anand (2020) argue that a good understanding of their own clients is an important step in the implementation of new technologies in retail. It means before retailers use new technologies in their shops they should know the opinion of their client on these new technologies and to know them really well to foresee their reactions. This could be for example done thanks to artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence can be used to collect data about consumers and customers and foresee their expectations according to what they like and believe. In this sense, a study from the company Gartner done in 2020 revealed that artificial intelligence which includes natural language understanding, natural language processing and machine learning is an unrivaled tool to analyze clients' feedback quickly with a great precision which is not possible to do with only human analysis.

Moreover, McLean and Osei-Frimpong (2019) said that the use of artificial intelligence could improve and change the way companies and their consumers interact. According to Ameen, Tarhini, Reppel and Anand (2020), artificial intelligence technologies can use the data collected in the past to highlight some product recommendations for the customers. Saponaro, Le Gal, Gao, Guisiano and Maniere (2018) say that usually AI is not used alone but in combination with a lot of other technologies such as virtual reality and so on. As we were saying earlier, in the metaverse the artificial intelligence could use data to change some setting of the shop such as its design, music, arrangement etc.

Besides what artificial intelligence can do, we also need to think about the trust commitment between customers and brands. Basically as Morgan and Hunt (1994) the theory is highlighting the process of the development of a relationship between a buyer

and a seller based on trust and commitment. Trust is a big part of our society since trust is implicitly present in various kinds of contracts, loans etc. but also in our relationships between humans or with entities such as brands. People buying brands trust to have better quality etc. However, for the AI, trust is based on the level of confidence of safety for example. Hengstler, Enkel and Duelli (2016) argue that the success of a relationship between a customer and automated machines or services is based on trust (trust to not be hurt, to not share your data etc.). Wang et al. (2019) go even further by saying that privacy is one of the most important components of trust. In this sense the privacy and safety of data collected should be really considered by retailers or companies since people like to know what is done with their data to have a minimum of control on them.

Furthermore, according to Ameen, Tarhini, Reppel and Anand (2020), the trust of customers or consumers should be considered by brand and retailer while introducing new technologies. Their study highlights that trust is an important factor for AI enabled experiences. For them it is important to gain the trust of consumers since AI is really complex and ambiguous. Ameen, Tarhini, Reppel and Anand (2020) continue by saying companies which share clearly their performances about data collection and analysis (such as safety, reliability etc.) have a better trust level than companies which are not doing so. Customers need to be reassured of the support of companies on the privacy of their data but also on how they are used and by who.

Beyond the trust component, the lack of human contact can be experienced by consumers. Despite of convenience for retailers such as reducing costs, better offers etc. It is important according to Ameen, Tarhini, Reppel and Anand (2020) to go over this convenience to understand the real “cost” for the consumers such as sacrificing human contact, stress on the use of their data, privacy etc. In our opinion, it could be really important to consider how some people are feeling by using it. We can easily imagine people who are alone and who do not have any network around them. It could be difficult for them to also renounce the only human contact they may have because of the use of artificial intelligence or new technologies. Ameen, Tarhini, Reppel and Anand (2020) found out the lack of human interaction is an issue for customers even if the AI services are convenient. They recommend using a personalized approach with a combination of human interactions and technology interactions. This combination



could improve and strengthen the relationship commitment between the customers and the brand.

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