The impact of marketing on customer’s behaviour

Influence or manipulation?

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Abstract

The modern society is often criticized as being a society of consumerism. In fact, people are exposed and solicited by marketing everyday through diverse manners. One of the most known is advertising which became a part of people’s life. This leads to strong social criticism, in this thesis we focus on France. Since marketing is a part of people’s daily life, the purpose of our thesis is to demonstrate how marketing is impacting on customer’s behaviour.

In order to understand how marketing is processing, we go through different theoretical concepts. Starting by defining influence and manipulation, we detail the customer through his/her needs, wants, demands, and the influencing factors. Then the role of marketing is explained which leads to buying decision process.

As the aim of this thesis is to understand a contemporary social process, a qualitative research method combined with a case study design is chosen as the methodology. In that regards, three focus groups have been conducted.

The findings of the thesis are presented in the empirical material chapter, which brings to a cross-case synthesis between the two products chosen to answer our purpose: the Actimel, a dairy product and the iPad, an internet tablet. The differences and similarities are highlighted regarding the theoretical concepts. In addition, the focus groups participants’ perception of marketing is analysed. It appears that marketing is negatively perceived even though the participants of the focus groups are actually impacted by it. In fact, they criticize the products presented but in the same time they find them interesting in some aspects.

In conclusion, the possibility to influence or manipulate a customer depends on the ability of the marketer to use the right tools and his/her ethical considerations. Noticing that the main difference between influence and manipulation is the intention behind.
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1 Introduction

In this chapter we start by explaining the concept of consumerism in the modern society followed by the marketing process, its role and the social criticism mainly in France. Then we continue by the purpose of this thesis and the research questions. Finally, we present the entire structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Baudrillard (1970), a French sociologist, describes people’s daily life as being governed by consumption through a multiplication, an abundance of products. He characterizes this phenomenon as being a society of consumer. Even if consumption is a part of human history (Smart, 2010) this “way of life in which having, desiring and wishing for more and more things have become a significant preoccupation” (Smart, 2010, p.5) is described as a modern phenomenon: consumerism (Smart, 2010). According to Miller (2009), the tale of Aladdin, from the 1.001 Arabian Nights, is a useful metaphor for consumerism.

“The Poor boy Aladdin discovers a magic lamp in a secret cave. When he rubs the lamp he releases a terrifying but powerful Genius. […] This genius of the Lamp grants Aladdin many wishes. […] In the modern world, the market is the Genius, and its products embody our wishes. […] Through many cycles of market research, consumer feedback, and economic competition, the market, like the Genius, also makes enormous efforts to fulfil our stated wishes - but often, like the Genius, it obeys the letter rather than the spirit of those wishes with frustrating consequences.” (Miller, 2009, p.19-20)

The world of goods and services then reflects what people want or at least what they think they want. Miller (2009) develops two categories of products:
- Things that bring us satisfaction
- Things that bring us “status” when others see that we own them

The last category shows that people can buy a certain kind of product because of how they “want to look” more that because they need it. Why would someone buy a Hummer H1 Alpha (it is not practical, it is costly (139.771 $), uses a lot of gas and has a poor reliability) if it were not an ornament? (Miller, 2009)

Regarding this phenomenon, people are permanently solicited to buy goods and services through marketing strategies (Smart, 2010). Actually, marketing is nowadays unavoidable in people’s daily life. As a fact, we are exposed to 15.000 commercial stimuli every day created by this field (Pêtre, 2007). One of the most known and recognised stimuli by people is advertisement. Actually, people think too narrowly that “marketing is a pretentious term for advertise” (Miller, 2009).

Metaphorically, advertisement can be seen as the visible part of the marketing iceberg, which is part of our daily life. In point of fact, people are exposed to 350 advertisements above the promotion line and 1.200 to 2.200 below the promotion line. In another point of fact, the worldwide advertisement spending is evaluated at 421 billion US Dollars (296, 8 billion Euros) in 2009 (emarketer.com). To compare, the budget of France, fifth world economic power, was 285, 23 billion Euros in 2010 (france.fr). So advertisement is all around, an extreme example of how it can be present is people’s life is Times Square in New York (Figure 1.1). This street is famous because of its advertisement all along the buildings.
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Regarding those information, some legitimate questions might be: Do I remember all these advertisements? Am I aware of all these stimuli? The fact is if you ask someone; tell me all the advertisements and commercial stimuli you have been exposed to today, the person won’t remember all of them, of course. The person might remember very few of them and that is normal because people do not look at them consciously. But it doesn’t mean that we do not remember them, some studies in neuromarketing show that those stimuli leave “implicit” memory traces (Pêtre, 2007).

All those facts lead us to analyse how marketing is acting on people’s daily life and more precisely on buying acts.

1.2 – Research problem

Boone and Kurtz (2011) point out the fact that if you ask three people to define marketing you will get three different definitions of marketing. Mainly because people define marketing as they perceive it through advertising and personal selling. They usually link marketing to those activities. But marketing begins long before the creation of the product itself. In Contemporary Marketing (2011), Boone and Kurtz define marketing as an “organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefits the organization and it stakeholders” (p.7).

Since Boone and Kurtz define marketing as “a set of processes”, we can go further and explain those processes with the definition of Kotler, Armstrong, Wong and Saunders (2008). They define marketing as “a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others” (p.7). To understand this definition we need to define some concepts: process, need, want, product and value.

The marketing process is both social and managerial: social because it involves an interaction between a company and its (potential) customer, and managerial because it is a way for a company to manage this interaction and to achieve sales target and/or market share objectives (Kotler et al., 2008). More than just a communication, a relationship is created between the customer and the company to develop a right market offering, which is “some combination of products, services, information or experiences offered to a market to satisfy a need or a want” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.9).

To be able to create the right market offering, marketers have to understand the needs, wants and demands of the consumers. According to Kotler et al. (2008), the needs are
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“states of felt deprivation” (p.8), the wants are “the form that human needs take as shaped by culture and individual personality” (p.9) and the demands are the “human want that are backed by buying power” (p.9). In other words, we can say that the need is the first element of a buying act, when a consumer recognizes a need, he/she wants something in particular to fulfil it, and then he/she rationalises it and has a demand, which fit with his/her budget.

Here is the real role of marketing; it’s to generate the right market offering that will fulfil the consumer’s need while fitting his/her demand and without completely forgetting his/her real want. So, it involves building profitable and value-laden exchange relationships with customers. From that point, Kotler et al. (2008) define marketing as “the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customer in return” (p.7). This marketing process can be presented as a five-step model:

This model (Figure 1.2) enlightens the importance of the value through the whole marketing process. That leads us to the concept of value, and especially the customer value, which is “the consumer’s assessment of the product’s overall capacity to satisfy his/her needs” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.11). As the perceived value for the customer increases, the customer satisfaction grows; and this is a chance for the company to have delighted customers and to create value from its customers via profits and customer equity.

But, marketing is more than just a process; it also studies concretely the behaviour and all of the customer’s psychological and environmental drivers in order to offer him/her the right products. It can be an analysis of the customer’s personality, religion, culture, his/her way of life, place of living (urban or rural), marital status, age; everything that has an impact on the buying act. With those elements, marketers understand better their (potential) customer and provide him/her a customised offer.

Even if marketing is supposed to understand the customer in a better way in order to bring him/her some added value, Kotler et al. (2008) point out that marketing has been accused of creating “false wants and too much materialism” (p.80). Indeed, people from various backgrounds notice that, and make a strong social criticism.

Noam Chomsky (2003), professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a political theorist and activist, defines marketing as: “a form of manipulation and deceit. It’s an effort to create artificial wants, to control the way people look and think about things. A lot of that marketing is straight propaganda, advertising” (p.235). Philippe Meyer (2001), a French doctor in sociology argues that “Marketing is a kind of venal sociology, bazaar ethnology
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whose purpose is to know what you do not need and we still could sell to you”\(^1\) (p.41). In France, there is a strong social criticism of marketing, and not only made by sociologists.

Marketing is also criticized in media, as in the French puppet show “Les Guignols de l’Info”, which reaches millions of people: around 76% of French people declare to watch this show at least occasionally (Ifop, 2007). Frequently, when Apple launches a new product, they use this company as an example. They make Steve Jobs ridiculous. To present the new Apple’s product, he always starts his speeches by “Ceci est une révolution” that can be translated by “This is a revolution”. He explains that you have to buy again every additional feature because it’s a total revolution and it’s new. The off voice says “Steve Jobs, il rend indispensable ce dont vous n’avez pas besoin” meaning “Steve Jobs, he makes essential what you don’t need”. This example of how Apple is represented by “Les Guignols de l’Info” is in appendix 1.

This social criticism leads to a reflection: as said by Noam Chomsky, is marketing really a manipulation: a control of something or someone to your advantage, often unfairly or dishonestly? Or is it just an influence: an affect or change of how someone or something develops, behaves, or thinks? (Cambridge Dictionaries, 2011).

Starting from this point, we can ask ourselves if marketing is an influencer and/or a manipulator. We will have to determine the real role of marketing in people’s daily life.

### 1.3 – Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how marketing is impacting on the customer’s buying behaviour; by manipulating and/or influencing.

### 1.4 – Research questions

In order to answer our purpose, we go through two questions:

From a customer perspective in a marketing context, what is/are the difference(s) between influence and manipulation?

Is marketing manipulating and/or influencing the customer during his/her buying process?

### 1.5 – Structure

To answer our purpose and research questions, our thesis will be divided in six chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction in which we present the background, the research problem, the purpose of this thesis and the research questions that help us to answer. The second chapter is the Theory; here, we define more precisely the four main concepts needed to understand our thesis – influence and manipulation, customer, marketing and buying process – before explaining our theoretical framework. In the third chapter, entitled Methodology and Method, we present the methods chosen for our thesis, the cases used and how we proceed. The fourth chapter is the Empirical Material; here we report the findings from our focus groups. The fifth chapter is the Analysis, where we link our theory and theoretical frame with the findings from the previous chapter. The last chapter is our Conclusion, in which we answer to our purpose, we present our contribution and suggest further research.

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\(^1\) Translated by the authors from « le marketing est une sorte de sociologie vénale, d’ethnologie de bazar dont le but est de savoir de quoi vous n’avez pas besoin et que l’on pourrait quand même vous vendre »
2 – Theory

In this chapter, we define more precisely the concepts needed to understand the purpose of this thesis in depth. We start by defining influence and manipulation; then the psychology of the customer is explained, the marketing role is developed followed by the buying process. Finally, the chapter ends with the theoretical model that summarizes the links between the different concepts.

2.1 – Influence & manipulation

The Cambridge dictionary defines influence as being “the power to have an effect on people or things, or a person or thing that is able to do this”. Cialdini (2009), a well-known psychologist defines six rules to influence: reciprocity, consistency and commitment, social proof, linking, scarcity, authority.

According to Cialdini (2009) there is firstly the reciprocity, which is developed by sociologists and anthropologists as being a basic norm of human culture. In fact the principle of this rule is that one person tries to repay something that another person has provided. To illustrate this point, Cialdini (2009) explains that a university professor tried an experiment by sending a Christmas card to a sample of strangers. The reaction was surprising; the great majority of sent him holidays cards addressed to him in return.

Secondly people want to be and look consistent within their beliefs, and way to behave. Moreover, doing an initial commitment is a security key because people are more willing to agree to the first commitment than other requests. Two Canadian psychologists (Knox and Inkster) remark that after placing bets at a racetrack, people feel more confident of their horse’s chance. People convince their selves that it is the right choice, once there is a commitment, personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently. Cialdini (2009)

Thirdly, the principle of social proof is to determine what people think is good. The average people refer to the group opinion, so more people is estimated as being just more it will seem right for the others. To demonstrate his point, Cialdini (2009) take the example of a well-known and practical product of our daily life: the shopping trolley. When Sylvain Goldman invented and proposed the shopping trolley, the concept was so unusual that customers did not use it. So he decided to try one last idea based on social proof to launch his product: hire fake shoppers to use it, which brought true customers to use it. Cialdini (2009)

Fourthly, linking is a simple principle to influence people because a person is easier to convince by someone sympathetic, link to his/her. An example of how this rule can work in practice is the Tupperware party. In this case, the Tupperware demonstrator sales to her/his friends or entourage. “The strength of that social bond is twice as likely to determine product purchase as is preference for the product itself” (Cialdini, 2009, p. 142).

Fifthly, scarcity, a thing seems to be more interesting and attractive when it is not ordinary, it is the law of the few. When a law prohibited the use and possession of laundry or cleaning products containing phosphates, residents react in two ways. First, some people drove to nearby counties to find phosphate detergents. People wanted to get those products so
much that some families finished by having 2 years of phosphate cleaners at home. Secondly, people rated “phosphate detergents gentler, more effective in cold water, better whiteners and fresheners, and more powerful on stains.” (Cialdini, 2009, p. 209)

Finally, the authority, people tend to be influenced and obey more easily when they perceived a legitimate authority. The Milgram study of obedience demonstrate this point, volunteer subjects were given the role of “teacher” while actor the role of “learner”. The “teacher” was delivering an electro-shock every time the “learner” had a wrong answer. The experimenter was present and represented the “authority” that was pressuring the “teacher”. When Milgram asked a group of students, if they would deliver the maximum shock, about 3% said “Yes”. The results of the experiment showed that 65% of the participants delivered it. The tendency to obey legitimate authorities is perceived as the good behaviour in the society, people were acting contrary their own preferences under that pressure (Cialdini, 2009).

In a marketing perspective, companies invest billions per year to study the customer behaviour and psychology. They conduct many surveys, interviews, observations to understand what the customer want and what he needs. This understanding drives them to know how to act to make the customer buying a product. Hanson and Kysar (1999) underline the fact that $8 billion per year are spent by companies to analyse and understand the customer’s psychology and behaviour. With the research, companies are more proficient into controlling the market.

In this way, marketing may propose some products that the customer did not imagine, did not ask for before. It proposes a product that was not expected by people and motivates the customer to buy it. This can be seen as controlling the customer in the company’s advantage. (Pervez, 2009) But if we look through the history there are many products that we did not expect and are a part of our daily life as the mobile phone or the internet. Indeed, does the way that marketing is continuously impacting the customer mean that he/she is manipulated?

The Cambridge dictionary defines manipulation as being mainly disapproved control of someone or something to your own advantage, often unfairly or dishonestly. Handelman defines manipulation as a motivating action where one person tries to make someone else act in a certain manner to reach specific goal. In fact the person acts on the other in order to make him/her doing something that he/she would not do in other circumstances.

In order to understand how marketing is impacting the potential customer, studies in neuromarketing (Pêtre, 2007) showed that even if people are not aware of it all the commercial stimuli have an effect on our unconscious. In fact, if people are often exposed to a brand (advertise on a bus, on a billboard…) when the customer will purchase, the brand will be in his/her mind and he/her will be more in favor to buy it. A study directed by North, Hargreaves and McKendrick in 1999 shows the impact that those stimuli can have in the buying process. Those professors diffused French or German music in an English supermarket. While there was the French music, 83% of the wine bought was from France. When it was the German music 65% of the wine bought was from Germany. When the customers were interviewed were not conscious of the music’s impact on their behaviour even though they recognize thought more about those countries when the music was on (Corneille, 2010).
In fact, marketing have an effect on the buyer’s choice; it is able to influence the customer, by fulfilling it needs and/or wants but also by anticipating their evolution. (Michon C., et al., 2010) It has been shown that marketing have also the ability to manipulate people as in the supermarket. People will probably not by so much of French or German wine in other circumstances. Mainly, the differences between manipulation and influence in marketing will be in the way that companies use their tool to impact the customer’s behaviour but also about the positive added value that both parts will find in their relationship (Pervez, 2009).

2.2 – Customer

The customer is very complex to analyse because some irrational elements impact on his/her needs, wants and therefore demands. There are psychological elements that cannot be externally controlled. Each customer has his/her own history, personality, culture and religion. In this section, we define need, want, demand and the uncontrolled factors of the (potential) customer.

2.2.1 Need – Want – Demand

As we saw in the introduction, the customer has primarily a need, so he/she wants something to fulfil his/her need. But what he/she is really expecting is a product that fulfils his/her need even if the want is not completely satisfied: the demand is the one that has to be fulfilled. The demand is the rationalisation of the want; it considers the buying power of the customer.

2.2.1.1 Need

Usually, the need is defined as a “state of felt deprivation” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.8). Maslow (1987) determines five types of needs that constitute a basic hierarchy (Figure 2.1).

![Maslow's hierarchy of needs](image)

Figure 2.1 Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (adapted from Maslow, 1987)

The first one, i.e. the most basic and so the most important, is the physiological need. It is a combination of the concept of homeostasis and the findings that appetites are a fairly efficient indication of actual needs or lacks in the body (Maslow, 1987). Maslow (1987) explains that “homeostasis refers to the body’s automatic efforts to maintain a constant, normal state of the blood stream (p.15). Then, he claims that the physiological needs, such as water content of the blood, salt content, sugar content, oxygen content, constant temperature of the blood, “are the most prepotent of all needs” (p.16) even if it is quite difficult to make any exhaustive list of fundamental physiological needs.
The second type of need is the safety need. Pride, Hughes and Kapoor (2009) define the safety needs as “the things we require for physical and emotional security” (p.284). This need is fulfilled by stability, dependency, protection, freedom from fear, anxiety and chaos. It also refers to a requirement for structure, order, law and limits (Maslow, 1987).

The third type of need is the belongingness and love need. Pride et al. (2009) define it as a social need, which is “the human requirement(s) for love and affection and a sense of belonging” (p.284). Maslow (1987) explains that the two previous needs have to be satisfied before this one, even if it is a very important need. Indeed, the love need involves an interaction with other people or group since it is based on giving and receiving affection.

Pride et al. (2009) define the fourth type, the esteem need, as “our need for respect, recognition, and a sense of our own accomplishment and worth” (p.284). According to Maslow (1987), the esteem need is divided into two classifications:
- The self-respect or self-esteem as “the desire for strength, achievement, adequacy, mastery and competence, confidence in the face of the world, and independence and freedom”;
- And the esteem of others as “the desire for reputation prestige, status, fame and glory, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, dignity, or appreciation” (p.21).

The last need, the self-actualisation need, at the top of the hierarchy, can be defined as “the need to grow and develop and to become all that we are capable of being” (Pride et al., 2009, p.284). Maslow (1987) enlightens the fact that the self-actualisation can vary from a person to another; indeed, people have not the goal in life and they will not express themselves on the same way.

2.2.1.2 Want and Demand

According to Kotler et al. (2008) the want is “the form that human need(s) take as shaped by culture and individual personality” (p.9). In other words, it means that a want is the product or service desired to fulfil a human need. There might be several wants that can satisfy the same need: “people have narrow, basic needs (e.g. for food or shelter) but almost unlimited wants” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.9).

As we saw in the introduction, the customer has primarily a need, so he/she wants something to fulfil his/her need. But what he/she is really expecting is a product that fulfils his/her need even if the want is not completely satisfied: the demand is the one that has to be fulfilled. The demand is the rationalisation of the want; it considers the buying power of the customer.

Therefore, demand can be defined as the “human want(s) that are backed by buying power” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.9). Jain and Khanna (2008) differentiate three terms that are commonly used to mean demand: desire, want, and demand. They illustrate their word with the example of a colour T.V.. They define desire as “just a wishful thinking” (p.2). They also explain that people’s desire will be called want when they are not willing to spend it on this desire even if they have enough money. The desire becomes a demand when people are finally ready to buy it.
Jain and Khanna (2008) present their definition of the individual’s demand: “an individual’s demand for a commodity may be defined as the quantities of that commodity that the individual is willing, able and ready to buy at each possible price during a given time period” (p.3). Thus, the five constituents of demand can be enlightened: (1) Desire for a thing (2) Money to satisfy the desire (3) Willingness to spend the money (4) Relationship of the price and the quantity of commodity demanded and (5) Relationship of time and the quantity of commodity demanded (Jain and Khanna, 2008, p.3).

### 2.2.2 Uncontrolled factors

The customer is very complex to analyse because some uncontrolled elements impact on his/her needs, wants and therefore demands. Marketing or a third party cannot control these elements. Each customer has his/her own personal and psychological factors and his/her cultural and social factors. We notice that personal and psychological ones are more internal and intrinsic to people and that cultural and social factors are more external; that is why we choose to present them into two different parts.

#### 2.2.2.1 Personal and psychological factors

The customer has some internal factors, which are the factors that cannot be controlled by marketing, nor by the customer himself/herself. These factors are mainly personal and psychological.

According to Talloo (2007), personal factors are divided in five personal characteristics of the buyer: the buyer’s age and life-cycle stage, the occupation, the economic circumstances, the lifestyle and the personality. The age and the life-cycle stage consider the fact that “people change the goods and services they buy over their lifetime” (Kotler, et al., 2008, p.250). In this perspective, Talloo (2007) recommends to marketers to often define their target markets as life-cycle groups and develop appropriate products and marketing plans. According to Kotler et al., there are three main stages: young, middle-aged and older as shown in table 2.2.

| Table 2.2 Family life-cycle stages, Kotler et al., 2008, p.251 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Young**                          | **Middle-aged** | **Older**       |
| Single                             | Single          | Older married   |
| Married without children           | Married without children | Older unmarried |
| Married with children              | Married with children |               |
| Infant children                    | Young children  |                 |
| Young children                     | Adolescent children |             |
| Adolescent children                | Divorced without children |         |
| Divorced with children              | Divorced with children |               |
|                                    | Divorced with children |               |

The way of consumption is also clearly influenced by people’s occupation (Talloo, 2007). Marketers have to identify the occupational group in order to provide the right offer to the right potential buyers; they analyse the people’s above-average interest in their products and services (Kotler et al., 2008). Talloo (2007) illustrates her idea by an example; she explains that a blue-collar worker and a company president will not buy the same product and especially concerning clothes and leisure activities.
The impact of marketing in customer’s behaviour

Influence or manipulation?

Another factor that will affect the goods and services bought is the economic circumstances (Talloo, 2007). Kotler et al. (2008) explain that “some marketers target customers who have lots of money and resources, charging prices to match” (p.252). Their point is explained with the example of Rolex positioning of its luxury watches, while Timex is positioned on the segment of more affordable watches. Talloo (2007) goes further by saying that marketers have to consider the economic indicators; indeed if a recession is coming, marketers have to redesign their strategy, reposition themselves and re-price their products. The lifestyle is a very important factor because even if people are coming from the same subculture, social class and even occupation they can have quite different lifestyles (Talloo, 2007). Kotler et al. (2008) explain that people’s lifestyle is expressed in his/her activities, interests, opinions and demographics.

According to Talloo (2007), the fifth personal factor is the personality and self-concept. The personality can be defined as “a person’s distinguishing psychological characteristics that lead to relatively consistent and lasting responses to his or her own environment”, while the self-concept is defined as “the complex mental picture that people have of themselves” (Kotler et al., 2008, pp253-254).

After the personal factors, Talloo (2007) explains that there are four psychological ones, such as the motivation, the perception, the learning, and the belief and attitudes. Kotler et al. (2008) define the motivation as “a need that is sufficiently pressing to direct the person to seek satisfaction of the need” (p.255). Talloo (2007) goes further by differentiating the biogenic needs that “arise from physiological states of tension” – hunger, thirst, discomfort – and the psychogenic needs that “arise from psychological states of tension” – need of recognition, esteem or belonging; all those needs are part of the Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

Then, Kotler et al. (2008) define perception as “the process by which people select, organise and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of the world” (p.258). Talloo (2007) explains that people do not react and feel in the same way, because of their own sensations, feelings and their five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. The differences are in the fact that everyone “attends, organises and interprets this sensory information in an individual way” (p.167).

The third psychological factor is the learning, that describes changes in an individual behaviour arising from experience” (Talloo, 2007, p.168). According to Kotler et al. (2008), learning appears through the interaction of “drives, stimuli, cues, responses and reinforcement” (p.260).

The last psychological factor presented by Talloo (2007) regroups the beliefs and attitudes. Kotler et al. (2008) define the belief as being “a descriptive thought that a person holds about something” and the attitude as being “a person’s consistently favourable or unfavourable evaluations, feelings and tendencies towards an object or ideas” (p.260). Talloo (2007) explains that it is through acting and learning that people acquire their beliefs and attitudes. These factors are going to as a very important role in their buying behaviour.

2.2.2.2 Cultural and social factors

The customer has some external factors, which are the factors that cannot be controlled by marketing, nor by the customer himself/herself. These factors are mainly cultural and social.
According to Talloo (2007), “cultural factors exert the broadest and deepest influence on consumer behaviour” (p.164).

Cultural factors include several aspects. The first one is the culture in a widely meaning. This is the most fundamental determinant of a person’s wants and behaviours. Indeed, the human behaviour depends mainly on where people are growing up and the society around them. Growing up in a society make people learn a basic set of values, perceptions, preferences and behaviour through a process of socialisation (Talloo, 2007). This way of growing up will determine a lot of future behaviours.

The second one is the subculture. Subcultures “provide more specific identification and socialisation for its members” (Talloo, 2007). According to Talloo (2007), four types of subcultures can be distinguished: (1) Nationality groups (2) Religious Groups (3) Racial Groups and (4) Geographical areas (p.164). Tischler (2010) regroups the first and the third types and calls that Ethnic Subcultures; according to him, it refers mainly to the immigrants groups that “have maintained their group identities and sustained their traditions even while adjusting to the demands of the wider society” (p.65). Both agree at demonstrating that subcultures are very important and determinant in the behaviour.

Wänke (2009) reports that through an experience, enhancing the problem of geographical areas, in an American supermarket where a Dutch has been asked to buy breakfast cereals. He was very confused when he saw the shelves because there was too much choice and he just picked one randomly. This demonstrates how deeply a habit or just the society in which you live may impact on your buying act.

The third type of cultural factor is the social class (Talloo, 2007). According to Talloo (2007), the social stratification of the society results as taking the form of social classes. Social classes can be also seen as subcultures because “it is possible to discern cultural differences among the classes” (Tischler, 2010, p.65). Kotler, Armstrong, Wong and Saunders (2008) highlight the importance of the demographic information of the buyer; indeed, more than just the geographic and socioeconomic information, the demographical one need to be considered. It consists in the gender – male or female, the age in completed years, the country of birth, the country of citizenship, the legal marital status and the household composition (p.242).

Social factors are also influencing the consumer’s behaviour. There are two main social factors: the reference groups and the family (Talloo, 2007). The reference groups may have a direct influence, those are called membership groups; or they may have an indirect influence on the person’s attitudes and behaviour. The difficulty for marketers is to identify the references groups that impact on their target customer because whatever the stage of the Product Life Cycle (PLC) in which the product is, the influence of those groups is always present (Talloo, 2007).

Then, the family can exercise strong influence on the buyer’s behaviour. According to Talloo (2007), there are two types of distinction in a buyer’s family. The first one is the Family of Orientation. This represents the buyer’s parents; and even if the buyer has no longer strong interactions with his/her parents, the influence is still there on the unconscious behaviour. The second one is the Family of Procreation. This represents the daily direct influence of the buyer’s spouse/husband and children. As explained below on the buying decision process, marketers are very interested in the roles and influence exert by the buyer’s relatives.
Marketing cannot control any of these elements – internal or external – it has to deal with them. The only thing that marketing can do is to create commercial stimuli, to make the customer feeling more comfortable and familiar with what he/she doesn’t know. Pêtre (2007) explains that even if people do not really pay attention to all the commercial stimuli and advertising, the major part of them will modify subconsciously people’s behaviour and buying intentions.

Nevertheless, the customer has a clue role in the marketing process and even in the buying process. Indeed, thanks to his/her bargaining power, the customer is the cornerstone of marketing. Wänke (2009) enlightens that “customers decisions are ubiquitous”; even if they are minor, they are real. People are making a lot of decision during the day. She explains that people do not always take existential decisions, such as having children or not, but they will take a lot of “countless minor decisions” during the whole day, “starting with the brand of toothpaste in the morning to choosing a movie after work” (p.7).

Even the tiniest choice made by the customer may have an impact for marketing and the companies’ offer.

2.3 Marketing

In this part, we define more precisely marketing and its different aspects. Marketing is composed of several elements. Firstly, the research part: it focuses on various surveys, quests, and analysis on a quantitative, qualitative or both ways. They are useful to appreciate a market, a product life cycle, or the competitors’ offer on this specific market. In this way, marketers are able to analyse the gaps and lacks on the market.

Research is also very helpful to understand the (potential) customer. Indeed, by analysing his/her needs, wants, behaviour, buying habits and all the demographical aspects of his/her life, a company may provide a market offering that suits (Kotler et al., 2008). More than just understanding the customer, marketing creates a real relationship between the company and its clients. Gummesson (2002) defines the relationship marketing (RM) as “marketing based on interaction within networks of relationships” (p.3). Then, he continues with the customer relationship management (CRM), which “is the values and strategies of relationship marketing – with particular emphasis on customer relationships – turned into practical application” (p.3).

Secondly, the strategic objectives are also a huge part on marketing. Those objectives will mostly determine the way of acting within a company. It can be product-oriented, without really taking care of the consumers or customer-oriented as we saw above. Strategic objectives also include the financial objectives (sales, margins). Pride and Ferrell (2011) explain that nowadays marketing is more and more “market-oriented” (p.12) in order to answer the real desire of the customer. We defined the needs, wants and demands of the customer in chapter 2.2.1.

In the research problem, we also defined marketing through Kotler et al. (2008) perspective. We can go further and add the definition of Pride and Ferrell (2011). They define marketing as “the process of creating, distributing, promoting and pricing goods services and ideas to facilitate satisfying exchange relationships with customers and develop and maintain favourable relationships with stakeholders in a dynamic environment” (p.4). This new approach is totally linked with the CRM strategy, as explained in this chapter, and enhances the fact that the marketing-mix is unavoidable to offer valuable products on a market and
achieve strategic goals. It is composed of the 4P’s (Kotler et al., 2008): product, price, place, and promotion.

2.3.1 Product

According to Kotler et al. (2008), the product represents the tangible product itself and the range it belongs to. Colmant (2009) develops this point and explains that the product has to satisfy a need or a want (p.151). Each product has to meet the expectations of the customers. Those expectations may vary during the buying process and according to people who might influence the customers’ choice.

Colmant (2009) also points out the fact that thanks to marketing, companies will be able to create and offer the right product to the customers. Another important element of the product is the packaging. It is defined as “the first customer’s visual references”\(^2\) (p.157). The packaging is an entire part of the product because, generally, this is the first approach customer has with the product he/she is going to buy.

2.3.2 Price

Kotler et al. (2008) define the price as the selling price of the products. Two strategies can be highlighted, the push and pull strategies. The first one is can be defined as “a promotion strategy that calls for using the sales forces and trade promotion to push the product through channels” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.442); in this case it is a financial-oriented strategy. Kotler et al. (2008) define the second one as “a promotion strategy that calls for spending a lot on advertising and consumer promotion to induce final consumers to buy the product” (p.442); in this case it is more a product-oriented strategy.

Colmant (2009) distinguishes the price itself and the pricing policy. The price is just the amount of money needed by the customer to buy the product; while the pricing policy is more complex. It involves marketing calculations and companies have to find the right price for each product. Colmant (2009) illustrates his point with the example of Champagne: if a company sells Champagne at 5€ the bottle, the customer will be suspicious, because Champagne is usually a high-price product, and will be unlikely to buy this brand of Champagne.

Each company has to find the right price for each product, while keeping in mind its objectives, positioning, strategy and target. The pricing policy is one of the most important element of the company strategy (Colmant, 2009).

2.3.3 Place

According to Kotler et al. (2008), the place represents the locations where the product can be purchased (physical and/or online stores) and the distribution channels. To go further, the place is any store that sells the demanded product. It might be a real store or an online store. The more visible is the store; the more people will find it easily. When the company has its own stores for its brand(s), the store has to be well-known and recognised by the customer, in order to facilitate the interaction with him/her.

\(^2\) Translated by the authors from “les premiers repères visuels du client”
But when the company does not have its own stores (food brands, consumer products,...), the place represents the place occupied by the product inside the store and the range of the this store. In this case, even if the scale is different, the principle is the same: the product has to be visible, remarkable in order to be bought by the (potential) customer. If the product has a good location/place in a store, it will be easier for the customer to find it and he/she will be more likely decided to buy it and to re-new this buying act.

2.3.4 Promotion

Kotler et al. (2008) define promotion as the ways of communication and the various media involved. Those media can be: TV, press, radio, internet,... According to Colmant (2009), “advertising” is a pejorative word and he rather prefers to use “communication”. Communication is a pillar for a company: if a company does not communicate and try to be recognised, it is destined to failure.

Colmant (2009) also distinguishes the internal and the external communication. The external communication is based on the internal one: by building a “corporate communication” the company will be more likely able to have a rational and logical “commercial communication”. This will be the “image” of the company.

There are two different ways of communication: advertising through medias and direct marketing (Comant, 2009, p.188). Direct marketing is when a company sends directly to its (potential) customers mailings and/or e-mailings. From the customer’s perspective, it seems more individual and personalised. The customer feels more important. It is linked with the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) as we saw above in this chapter.

By taking into account all these elements, a company is supposed to deliver and offer the right product to the right customer.

2.4 – Buying process

2.4.1 Buyer decision process

Marketing needs to study the customer’s buying process to answer the questions what, where, how, how much, when, why he/she buys. In fact, the marketer details and examines the different steps to understand how the customer thinks and acts. (Kotler et al., 2008)
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Figure 2.3 Buying process (adapted from Kotler et al., 2008, p.265)

Need recognition: It is the first step of the buyer decision process where the potential customer recognizes a need or a problem. This starts by identification by the buyer of a desired state from an actual state (Lee and Johnson, 2005). In fact, the need might be stimulated by internal stimuli, which is one of the person’s normal needs (hunger, thirst...); and/or external stimuli that might be environmental elements (the smell of bakery, a nice dress in a shop’s window). In fact, human beings are most conscious of visual stimuli even if smell starts to be recognized as an important one (Kotler et al., 2008). Moreover, Hogan (1999) develops three reasons that make people buying:
- Principle: people who “tend to buy products and services that make a statement about their beliefs” (p.91)
- Status: people who tend to have a certain status and make it obvious to others
- Experience: people who “do things because they are fun, adventurous, exciting…” (p.92)

As the customer is differently affected by diverse kind of stimuli, the marketing needs to develop programmes that involve and adapt these stimuli (Kotler et al., 2008). At this stage the marketing should understand what lead a customer to buy a specific product, by finding out what kinds of needs or problems arise (Armstrong et al., 2009).

Information search: The customer starts to look for information, he/she “may simply have heightened attention or may go into active information search” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.266). A potential customer may or may not search for information depending on the situation. If the satisfying product is near at hand, the customer is likely to buy it at that moment. But, if the potential customer may keep his/her need in memory or undertake look for information related to it. From that, the customer can get information from several sources ((Armstrong et al., 2009) as personal sources (family, friends, neighbours...), commercial sources (advertising, sales people, internet...), public sources (mass-media, consumer-rating organisations, Internet...) or experiential sources (handling, examining...).

In this step, the marketer should identify which sources are used and the importance of each. Indeed, commercial, which is the main source of evaluation that normally informs the customer, is totally controlled by marketing (Kotler et al., 2008).

Evaluation of alternatives: The customer evaluates the choice set from the information already collected. In this stage, the buyer looks for the best alternative regarding factors that seems important to him/her as price, quality or time delivery (Lee, Johnson, 2005). As the customer is looking for certain benefits that can be acquired by buying certain products, he/she will attributes a certain importance to the various characteristics (Kotler et al., 2008).
So marketers should study how they evaluate the alternatives, which characteristics are the most important (Kotler et al., 2008). In fact, if marketers “know what evaluative processes go on, marketers can take steps to influence the buyer’s decision” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.270). However, the evaluation process is not unique. In fact, the attitude toward the different choices depends on the individual customer and the different buying situation. (Armstrong et al., 2009)

**Purchase intention, attitudes of others, unexpected situational factors:** The purchase intention is the first choice of the customer, after this stage, some external arguments enters in the process: attitudes of the others and unexpected situational factors. The attitudes of the others can be related to the influencers in the buying roles, as explained below. The unexpected situational factors (financial, familial...) are uncontrollable by the customer and the marketer (Kotler et al., 2008).

**Purchase decision:** It is the “process in which the consumer actually buys the product” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.271). This decision might be also influenced by the perceived risk. The level of risks is different regarding the type of purchase; so the customer tries to reduce these risks through the research of information, looking for national brands, taking warranties. The marketer should understand those factors to provide the right information to the customer that will reduce the perceived risks (Kotler et al., 2008).

**Post-purchase behaviour:**
The post purchase behaviour is based on the formal or informal evaluation of the product by the customer (Lee, Johnson, 2005). The satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the buyer is determinate by the relation between the customer’s expectations and the perceived performances (Armstrong et al., 2009). Indeed, a common response is for the customer to have doubts about the purchase, it is called cognitive dissonance (Lee, Johnson, 2005). In this case, marketing should find ways to help the customers move through it (Kotler et al., 2008). For example, advertising can reinforce the reasons for making the purchase (Lee, Johnson, 2005).

### 2.4.2 The different types of buying behaviour

As it is explained in the purchase decision, the customer perceived a different level of risk regarding the types of product. In fact the decision-making varies with the type of buying decision. (Kotler et al., 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High involvement</th>
<th>Low involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant differences between brands</strong></td>
<td>Complex buying behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Few differences between brands</strong></td>
<td>Dissonance-reducing buying behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.4 Four types of buying behavior (Kotler et al., 2008 p.262)*

**Complex buying behaviour:** In this purchase’s category the customer is highly involved and perceives significant differences between brands. It can also be when the product is expensive, not usually purchased, highly self-expressive or the risk perceived is important (Cant et al., 2006). Regarding those elements, the customer needs to go through a learning
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process. He/she needs to develop beliefs and attitudes about the product. Then, he/she can make a thoughtful choice. It is really important for marketers to understand this complex process and help the potential customer to learn about the product (Kotler et al., 2008). Usually, marketers “must motivate store sales people and the buyer’s acquaintances to influence the final brand choice” (Kotler et al., 2008, p.263).

Dissonance-reducing buying behaviour: In this case, the customer is highly involved in the purchase as for an expensive, infrequent or risky one. But, he/she does not see a big difference between brands. The customer responds more to the price or the convenience than for the complex buying behaviour. The main marketers’ role in this purchase’s category is to provide evidence and help the customer before and after the brand’s choice (Kotler et al., 2008). The potential customer will shop quite quickly, his/her decision will be determined by shopping around and will figure out what is available on the market (Cant et al., 2006).

Habitual buying behaviour: This category is at the opposite from the complex buying behaviour, here he/she has a low involvement and perceives few differences between brands. It is basically for low-cost and usual purchased products. The potential customer is not brand loyal; it is usually a habitual purchase (Cant et al., 2006). For this kind of products, the customer does not go through a research process; he/she gets the information about the products through advertisement. In this context, marketers use prices and sales promotion to stimulate the customer. Moreover, marketing tries to reach the customer by using symbols and imagery in the advertisement’s campaigns (Kotler et al., 2008).

Variety-seeking buying behaviour: This type of behaviour is characterized by a significant perceived difference between brands but a low involvement. The customer often switches between brands (Cant et al., 2006). In this case, marketing has also some strategies to reach the customer. The market leader will try to get to the habitual buying behaviour shelf space, avoiding out-of-stock and do frequent reminder advertising. Challenger will motivate through prices, sales promotions, free samples and advertising (Kotler et al., 2008).

2.4.3 Buying roles

As it is explained above, the buying process is complex, regarding the different steps the customer goes through and the different behaviour he/she may have. During all this process, marketing is present using different strategies to stimulate the customer. There is another element that marketers need to study: the different buying roles. It is necessary for marketers to understand and identify these roles in order to take a right targeting decision (Sahaf, 2008). In fact, the purchase can involve more than one person; indeed there are five different buying roles (Kotler et al., 2008). Noticing that more than one role can be played by the same person (Saxena, 2009). These roles are:

The initiator is the person who suggests the idea of buying a certain product (Sahaf, 2008). It can be a person from the customer’s family, a friend, a colleague or a sales person (Saxena, 2009).

The influencer is the person whose view or advice influences the buyer (Kotler et al., 2008). The influencer is also perceived as an expert (Saxena, 2009). In fact, the potential customer values the opinion of this person (Sahaf, 2008).

The decider is the person who makes the buying decision, decides whether, what, how or where to buy (Kotler et al., 2008). The decider usually considers the economic and non-economic parameters before making a decision (Saxena, 2009).
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Influence or manipulation?

The *buyer* is the person who makes the actual purchase. Once the decision is done someone else can make the purchase (Kotler et al., 2008).

The *user* is the person who finally uses or consumes the product (Sahaf, 2008).

People who play these roles aim different values in the product or the service. Their perception is determined by their prior experience, experience of others, media reports and the marketing of the product or service. The value perceived depends also on the potential satisfaction of the product or the service (Saxena, 2009).

To illustrate how the buying roles can be divided, Saxena (2009) uses the example of a fictive family, the Mathurs buying a holiday plan. Mr and Mrs Mathur work in a foreign bank in Mumbai and they have a five years old daughter. One day, Mrs Mathur’s friend Geeta, who is also a colleague, comes back from a weekend in Goa. She is really enthusiastic and describes her stay. Geeta plays the role of the initiator. Back home, Mrs Mathur talk to her husband about Geeta’s trip and insists that they plan a similar holiday. Next day, Mrs Mathur sees an advertisement of the Goa Penta Hotel, which offers a free one-way air ticket to the tourists staying for three nights and four days until the 30th of September. She calls the hotel’s sales office and a sale person gives her details about the facilities and the organisation of the trip. The advertisement and the sale person are influencers. The facilities represent a perceived value for Mrs Mathur. After this process she might take a decision with her husband, buy the holiday plan, and all the family will use it.

### 2.5 – Theoretical framework

On the first hand, we choose to define marketing as the 4 P’s: product, price, place, and promotion. Marketing interacts with the customer and vice-versa. In order to develop products, to decide the price, the place and the promotion, marketing needs to study the customer. In fact, it has to go through different aspects of the customer: his/her needs and wants, demands; without forgetting his/her psychological and environmental factors.

This interaction between marketing and customer has an objective: impacting the buying process. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how marketing is impacting on the customer’s buying behaviour, through his/her needs and wants; by manipulating and/or influencing.

*Figure 2.5 Theoretical framework (made by the authors)*
3 – Methodology and method

In this chapter, we present the methodology and method we use for our thesis. Since we are doing a case study, we explain how we design it and what the different ways to collect the data are. Then, we develop the method we choose to conduct the study: the focus group. Finally, we enhance the reliability and validity of our experiment and the ethical consideration towards the interviewees.

3.1 – Methodology

The research problem leads to determine how marketing influences and/or manipulates the customers. To solve this problem, we need to define a methodology that will rationalise the conduct of our research. There are two types of research strategy. The first one is the qualitative research, which is a strategy that “emphasizes words rather than quantification” (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.28). Moreover, this type of research is more “process-oriented” (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005, p.110). The second one is the quantitative research, which is a strategy that “emphasizes quantification” (Bryman, Bell, 2007, p.28). It is a “result-oriented” approach (Ghauri, Grønhaug, 2005, p.109).

The following table (Table 3.1) shows the main differences between those two types of research strategy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1 Common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman, Bell, 2007, p.426)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Point of view of researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Researcher distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Theory testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Static</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hard, reliable data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Macro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Artificial settings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our purpose bring us to study the role of marketing in the customer’s behaviour; so, we are studying a social process and not a social structure, we need to have a relative closeness to the data and to participants (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). In line with the characteristics presented in the Table 3.1 above, the qualitative approach will be chosen. Indeed, it will be more relevant to use this approach to understand the context of the process and its meaning.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are often combined into a case study design. This method is used to understand a complex social phenomenon; actually it “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003, p.2). To define if this strategy should be used, three characteristics need to be analysed (Yin, 2003):
- The type of research question
- The control over behavioural events
- The focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena
The following table (Table 3.2) is summarizing the different relevant strategies that might be used in a social research. Those strategies are classified regarding the three characteristics mentioned above (Yin, 2003):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Form of research question</th>
<th>Requires control of behavioural events?</th>
<th>Focuses on contemporary events?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, why?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, what, where, how many, how much?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival analysis</td>
<td>Who, what, where, how many, how much?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>How, why?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>How, why?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Firstly, the purpose of our thesis is to understand how marketing is proceeding, through influence and/or manipulation, to have an impact on the customer’s purchase. As our purpose is to analyse a process, the form of our question will be “how”. Secondly, as the purpose is to appreciate how the role of marketing is impacting on the customer buying process it will not be relevant to control the behaviours. As it is developed in the theory chapter, marketing has a role in each step of the buyer decision process. In fact, we need to observe how they behave to understand the marketing’s impact. Finally, as we are studying a contemporary phenomenon as shown in the introduction and the role of marketing nowadays on the customer, the case study seems to be the most relevant strategy for our experiment.

3.2 – Designing the case study

The case study design incorporates five important components (Yin, 2003):
- A study’s questions
- Study propositions
- Unit(s) of analysis
- The logic linking the data to the propositions
- The criteria for interpreting the findings

Regarding our theory development, our study question will be: How marketing make people buying a product instead of another one? By manipulating? By influencing? From that point, we need a proposition to reflect our theoretical issue and show where we should look to find appropriate evidence. In this research, the proposition is to show that marketing is not a manipulation of the customer’s buying process but might be seen in this way. That bring us to define what the “case” is and what our unit of analysis is. Basically, we want to observe individuals, how they act through the buying process and understand how marketing impact on them. The two last components will be defined in the method of analysis sub section.

In research design, it needs to be decided if a single or a multiple case study designs will be chosen regarding some considerations (Yin, 2003). Firstly, some situations involve only single cases: the unusual or rare case, the revelatory case and the critical case. Secondly, the major underlie of using a multiple case study is to follow the “replication” logic. This is not a sampling logic; it is comparable to the use of multiple experiments. The immediate research goal would be to replicate the findings on a second, third or more experiments. Finally, the single case study design is more vulnerable than the multiple one, the chances of having good and reliable results will be better even if it is a “two-case” case study. Moreover, if you
can have common conclusions regarding the different cases, the external generalizability of the findings is extent.

In this research, we are going to use a multiple case design because we need to replicate to apply our theory. In fact, we need to show that marketing in influencing or manipulating no matter the products. If only one product is chosen, the generalization will be problematic as the result can be seen as specific to this product. But if several products are chosen the reliability of the research will be better.

Thereafter there are two logics underlying the use of multiple-case studies to analyze before choosing the cases (Yin, 2009). For each case, it can be either a literal replication, where the results predicted are similar; or a theoretical replication where the results predicted are contrasting but for predictable reasons. In our case, we are doing a theoretical replication by choosing a “two-tail” design where the cases are both extreme. In fact, the purpose of our thesis is to define how marketing influences or manipulates the customer through the buying process, so it is more relevant to observe the impact for different kind of products. Our proposition mentioned above is to show that marketing is not a manipulation but might be seen in this way. To prove our proposition, we needed to find two products that might be seen as pure marketing, products that do not fulfill an essential need. In this way, if those products are not really needed why people buy them, is it a result of the marketing manipulation? In addition, we need products coming from extreme categories in order to get a better argument regarding the generalization of the results. So we decided to choose a product of daily life and one from high technology.

Taking into account those considerations, we chose two products that are distributed on the French market: Actimel and iPad. The Actimel is drink yoghurt (figure 3.3), which is a product of daily life. This product’s advertisement explains that the main attract is that it stimulates the immune system. The iPad is an internet tablet (figure 3.4), which is a symbol of high technology. The main argument is that it is more practical than a laptop because it is more transportable. Better than a netbook because it is more efficient, and has a bigger screen than a smart phone.

So, it is interesting for our purpose to observe how people respond face to those strategies and if they buy those products for those reasons or others. Moreover, using those two products will help to analyse the marketing role, in regarding the 4 P’s (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion).

We choose to focus on France because as demonstrated in the research problem, there is a strong criticism of marketing in this country. Moreover, since we are French, it might be easier for us to understand the problem we face, but it does not affect the possibility of replication of our experiment.
As we have one level of unit analysis: “the impact of marketing on the buying process”; the holistic view will be preferred (Yin, 2003).

3.3 – Collecting data

There are two main methods to collect the data: the qualitative and the quantitative way. As we have chosen the qualitative collection in the methodology, we are going to introduce the primary and secondary data that will be used.

3.3.1 Secondary data

The secondary data is the information that already exists and found by the investigators. This data is useful to solve but also to get a better understanding of the research problem (Ghauri, Grønhaug, 2005). According to Ghauri, Grønhaug (2005), there are different types of sources such as books, journal articles, online data sources, catalogues. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) add and describe other sources of evidence. They detail the written material as being correspondence, minutes of meetings, reports transcripts of speeches and administrative public records. They also detail the non-written material as being voice and video recordings, pictures, drawings, DVDs and CD-ROMs and databases.

Basically, the secondary data represents the literature review that has been done by the investigators. In addition, Yin (2003) advises to use multiple sources of evidence to increase the validity of the thesis. In our case, different sources were used: books, journal articles and online data. Those sources were found in the Halmstad library and different online databases as shown in the following table 3.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Database</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumerism, influence, manipulation, marketing, influence and manipulation, influence and marketing, manipulation and marketing, neuromarketing, buying/buyer process, buying/buyer roles, buying/buyer behaviour, consumer, customer, consumer/customer behaviour, social criticism, marketing criticism, marketing ethics, need, want, demand, psychological factors, personal factors, cultural factors, cultural factors, customer factors, product, price, place, promotion, marketing strategy, push, pull, marketing research, business research methods, qualitative research methods, case study, case study design, focus group, Apple, iPad, Actimel, Danone, iPad advertisement, Actimel advertisement</td>
<td>Google, Google Books, Google Scholar, Cyberlibris – ScholarVox, Halmstad university library: Hulda, Libris, Diva</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.2 Primary data

The primary data is the one that we are going to collect directly through our research. As we are using a qualitative approach to collect the data different sources might be used (Bryman, Bell, 2007):

- Ethnography and participant observation
  The participant observer/ethnographer immerses him-herself in a group for a certain period. In this way, the investigator can listen and observe the interactions and the behaviours.
- Interviewing
The impact of marketing in customer’s behaviour

Influence or manipulation?

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Hayat El Amrani

It is the most used method in qualitative research; it can be either semi-structured or unstructured.

- Focus group
  In this method, several participants are interacting on a specific theme or topic.

To let the investigators understand the reason of the customers’ behaviour is the purpose of this study. The question goes through a complex behaviour. It seems to be more relevant to let people talking freely, interact about marketing and the products that we will introduce, to understand how they think, they behave. Regarding those considerations the focus group seems to be the most interesting. Moreover, focus group is a relevant method when a process is studied which is the case here.

3.4 – Conducting the study in focus group

The focus group are organized into separate groups in terms of age. This choice is done regarding the research problem (Bryman, Bell, 2007). The reason is that we want to observe how marketing impacts the potential customers and the age can be an influence factor. In fact, the different generation were not and are not exposed to the marketing in the same way. The youngest generation(s) grows up surrounded by media. In the opposite, elder generation(s) adapts their self to the media.

- 1st: 18-30 years old (in direct with the group)
- 2nd: 30-40 years old (through Adobe connect)
- 3rd: 40-70 years old (in direct with the group)

In order to replicate properly the experiment some conditions need to be controlled:

- Each focus group will be composed by 6 people, the typical group size is six to ten members (Bryman, Bell, 2007)
- Every session will last from 30 to 45 minutes
- To avoid some cultural issues and to be sure that the people are exposed to the same “marketing”, the groups will be only composed by French people
- Interviews will be filmed
- To conduct those interviews, the investigator will be a moderator. This strategy will allow the investigator to let the discussion flow freely and intervening to bring some issues and/or topic. (Bryman, Bell, 2007)

In order to realise our three focus groups, eighteen people were selected because they were French, so it avoids the cultural issues; they all live in the same society and country – in France – and everyone is supposed to have the same exposition to the commercial stimuli. We choose to focus on the French market for convenience reasons. Since we are French, it is easier to understand the language subtleties – metaphor, rhetorical figures – and people’s cultural background. The participants are also selected by convenience, reaching easiness and obviously by age. The following table 3.6 summarises who was present during each focus group, noticing that two people did not come at the last minute in the focus group 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group 1: March 28th 2011</th>
<th>Focus group 2: April 23rd 2011</th>
<th>Focus group 3: May 10th 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>André – 72 years old</td>
<td>Naja – 31 years old</td>
<td>Benoît – 19 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Céline – 67 years old</td>
<td>Camel – 40 years old</td>
<td>Jean-Marc – 21 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth – 60 years old</td>
<td>Sylvia – 30 years old</td>
<td>Clara – 19 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert – 63 years old</td>
<td>Julien – 31 years old</td>
<td>Elise – 20 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chantal – 47 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td>Roxane – 19 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean – 48 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td>Valentin – 21 years old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6 Composition of the focus groups

In order to realise our three focus groups, eighteen people were selected because they were French, so it avoids the cultural issues; they all live in the same society and country – in France – and everyone is supposed to have the same exposition to the commercial stimuli. We choose to focus on the French market for convenience reasons. Since we are French, it is easier to understand the language subtleties – metaphor, rhetorical figures – and people’s cultural background. The participants are also selected by convenience, reaching easiness and obviously by age. The following table 3.6 summarises who was present during each focus group, noticing that two people did not come at the last minute in the focus group 2.
Regarding those considerations, and to be a moderator, we choose a semi-structured interview and the questionnaire in appendix 2 is used. During the focus groups, we ask questions about the two products – Actimel and iPad – their price, the place and the promotion. Then, we ask the interviewees if they would buy those products, or at least one, and if this because they want it or they need it. After that, we ask them to write three words that characterize marketing according to them, why they choose those. Finally, we ask them how they perceive the overall marketing process.

3.5 – Reliability, validity and ethical considerations

3.5.1 Reliability and validity

To judge the quality of a case study research, some tests need to be done. Yin (2003, p.34) defines those common tests. Firstly, we need to construct validity by establishing relevant operational measures for the studied concepts. In line with it, multiple sources were used through the secondary and primary data (developed in section 3.3). Secondly, the external validity needs to set up the domain where the findings can be generalized. In that regards, the replication logic has been used in a two-case case study. Finally, the reliability demonstrates that if the study is repeated on the same conditions, the same results will be found. It needs to be noticed that the interviews have been done in French with French people. In addition, the questionnaire and the empirical have been translated into English by the authors.

3.5.2 Ethical considerations

“Ethics is made up of norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others. The goal of ethics in research is to ensure that no one is harmed or suffers adverse consequences from research activities” (Cooper and Schindler, 2001:112) in Herbst and Coldwell (2004, p.18).

Herbst and Coldwell (2004) highlight some important aspects that need to be respected, such as the obligation to be honest because the respondents are the main source of information. Before starting our interviews, we precised that we were students at Halmstad University and we were doing a thesis about the impact of marketing on customer’s behaviour. We did not precise the terms influence or manipulation in order to avoid any biase in their answers.

The second point enhanced by Herbst and Coldwell (2004) is the privacy, which is mostly related to the principle of anonymity. In that regards, we asked them at the beginning if they consent to be quoted and called by their first name. All the agreements have been filmed during the focus groups.
4 – Empirical material

In this chapter, we present the findings of our focus groups. It is divided in three topics, Actimel, iPad and marketing’s perception of the participants.

4.1 Findings on Actimel

In the Focus group 1 everybody knows Actimel, they first explain what they think about the product. For Jean and Céline, Actimel helps to feel good; Céline added that there are vitamins in. To prove her point Céline says: “look Mamée (André and Elisabeth’s mother) she drinks Actimel and she is in good shape.” Immediately, Elisabeth adds with a joyful voice “she is 90! And it is thanks to Actimel”. Also for Chantal, Actimel helps Mamée to be in a good shape. Indeed, Chantal thinks that it is mainly for old people. Elisabeth agrees with Chantal, in fact, she asks Jean: “Do you like it? – Yes – So, you are part of the senior citizen” (laughs). Moreover, Elisabeth thinks that it is just milk, same thought for André who sees Actimel as fermented milk. In addition, Céline points out that her granddaughter who does not drink milk drinks Actimel instead. In this line, Jean highlights the fact that the casein, which is promoted by Actimel, is actually a milk protein. They finally all agreed on the fact that it is basically a kind of fermented milk and nothing else. In fact, Chantal and Elisabeth prefer yoghurt. According to Elisabeth, it has no action and no added value, Chantal completes by saying that it is the same as a dairy product (cheese, milk, yoghurt). But Gilbert adds that now it is launched, people drink it anyway.

About the price Elisabeth says that she will not spend money for Actimel because she hates the taste. Anyway, she buys it for her mother who is 90. Chantal and Jean have no idea about the selling price of this product. In fact, Chantal says that she never buys it neither tastes it. She never had the will to buy some. According to her, they probably do not target the right people. To help the other participants, Elisabeth and Céline explain that in small supermarket Actimel is sold 3.60€ which is expensive for them. And in big supermarket Elisabeth remember that it is about 2.80€. André thinks that it is expensive regarding the price paid to the milk’s producers. For Jean, compared to traditional yoghurt, Actimel is quite expensive!

The participants have been asked about the access to the product, Gilbert, Elisabeth, Céline and André think that it is really easy to find. Chantal insists that there are large linear, André and Jean agreed and add that the product is well highlighted. Danone had a good idea according to Jean, André and Chantal.

When they are asked about the last advertisement that they saw on the product Jean remember that Actimel helps to feel tougher, Chantal completes by saying “we feel, it does not mean we are” tougher. In addition, Chantal says that when she sees an Actimel she thinks about the advertisement showing old people drinking that to be tougher. She says that she is “conditioned” by the advertisement. Gilbert adds that is a “lying advertisement” because they said that the benefits promoted in the advertisement were not true but does not remember a clear advertisement that makes everybody laughs. André remembers that it facilitates the intestinal transit and Céline adds it was shown that with Actimel we spend a nice winter. Elisabeth explains that she does not look advertisement, she always changes channels. So Chantal asks her how she knew the product, Elisabeth says: “thanks to Mamée”.

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André and Céline buy Actimel because they like it, but when Chantal ask them if they buy it with conviction, they admit that they are not really convinced by the actions of the product.

In the Focus group 2, they all know Actimel. To describe the product Najia says Danone, Sylvia says dairy product, Camel and Julien agreed that it is milk.

Najia and Julien say that they don’t know the price. Camel spontaneously answers that it is too expensive. Sylvia adds that it is expensive for her too. Camel argues on the fact that it is expensive when you have children because it is basically a product for children and if there is 3 or 4 kids in a family it can be really be expensive. For Sylvia Actimel is not a product for children, she knows more adults who drink Actimel than children. Julien agreed with her and highlight the fact that is has some client, he is an entrepreneur, who offers him some Actimel with the coffee. They both explain that people drink Actimel because the “think” that it helps them. After discussing about the price, they basically think that it is expensive for what it is except Julien. They propose about 1.5€ for the six bottles. Julien points out the fact that if he was thinking that it would really help him, he will pay the actual price which surprise Najia. Camel insists that 1.5€ is a fair price for people with children.

About the placement of the product it is easy to access for the participants. Julien adds that even if does not often shopping he saws the product.

Regarding the Actimel’s promotion, Camel thinks directly of an advertisement that he saw on TV and was talking about drinking Actimel for breakfast. Sylvia adds that she remember the same kind of advertisement saying that Actimel in the morning helps you feel good. Camel adds that there was another advertisement with a young girl, a woman and an old woman, which brings Najia to remember this advertisement showing the different generations drinking Actimel. Najia says the slogan “And you, what are you doing to feel good in the morning?” the fact that she reminds the slogan surprise Sylvia and Camel.

In the Focus group 3, everybody knows Actimel. The first word coming for Clara is every morning product, for Benoît it is pure and healthy. Roxane explains that since she does not like milk she drinks Actimel everyday; she points out the fact that it is a good product for people who do not drink milk several times during the interview. According to Roxane and Benoît it is a product for children and elderly people. According to Elise it is a product that can be offered to people who need calcium.

There is not a good price for value according to them. Clara enhances by saying that there are only six bottles, so not enough for an entire week. Roxane says that it is very expensive and this is the reason why she reduced her consumption of this product. Elise explains that even if she thinks that seven bottles in a pack is not a really easy packaging to create, it would represent one Actimel per day and it would be better. Benoît supports her on the fact that a seven-bottles packaging would be hard to create. Clara points out that it pushes people to buy again and more. According to Elise it is too small and too expensive. Jean-Marc follows her on that point and adds that he cannot see the added value of this product, and he sees more this product as a product for children because of the small packaging.

They all agree on the fact that this product is easy to access and available in the right places, they add all together “everywhere!. Benoît specifies that it is easy to find it in supermarkets for example. Jean-Marc adds that as soon as you feel a little bit weak, you can go anywhere to get you an Actimel.
The last thing Valentin remembers about an Actimel advertisement is elderly people, while Clara remembers a mother who gives an Actimel to her son every morning. She explains that when the son drinks the product a yellow circle of light appears around him. Roxane remembers small aliens who go inside a child body and strengthen from inside the little boy; which look like a cartoon. According to her, it is to attract children. Elise, Jean-Marc, Valentin and Benoît agree on the catch phrase of Actimel advertising: “Strengthen natural defences”\(^3\). After a while, Elise remembers an advertisement on which you can see a very tired woman in the morning, then she drinks an Actimel and after that she seems happy, ready to go to work and to have a good day. Valentin and Jean-Marc have the feeling to remember this advertisement too. Roxane highlights the fact that Actimel advertisements are more often present on TV than on billboards. Jean-Marc adds that “Bifidus Actif” is one of the characteristics of the Actimel, but Elise and Roxane say that it is Activia – another Danone’s product. When Jean-Marc asks what is inside Actimel instead, Elise answers that it contains vitamin D, but Jean-Marc asks Benoît if there is any Omega 3 in it. At this point of the interview, Clara realises that they are mixing up between Activia, Danonino and Actimel.

4.2 Findings on the iPad

In the Focus group 1, only Chantal and Jean know the iPad. Chantal tries to explain to the other participants that it is a kind of big iPhone, “as a laptop, without CD-reader, without keyboard because it is tactile, created to be more itinerant”. According to her it is more portable than a laptop, because it is lighter, easier to handle. Jean adds that you can communicate on Skype with it thanks to the speakers and the internet connexion. Jean says that it too technologic for him, he does not feel any need concerning this product, and he rather prefers a computer. Chantal thinks that it is a very beautiful product and practical, she would buy it gladly; she specifies that she would use it more during vacation and not really at home because she sees the product as occasional and complementary, and she points out that it is more practical than an iPhone thanks to the bigger screen. Gilbert thinks it is useless. Elisabeth prefers her computer. Céline would not buy it, neither André who thinks as Jean that it is too sophisticated.

Chantal thinks that it is quite expensive, but since it is an Apple product, this is a quite reasonable price. According to Gilbert, it depends on the person and the use you have for this product, maybe the sales representatives use it. Chantal completes by saying that the target group is not 70 years-old people, nor young people because they have an iPhone. Elisabeth is not convinced at all by the product.

It is the first time that Elisabeth and Céline see this product. André already saw this product even if he does not really know it. According to Jean, it is a good thing that the iPad is only distributed in authorized stores, it improves the image, Chantal agrees on that point. She adds that the Apple communication is based on the standing of the products, a too large diffusion of the products could damage the image.

André remembers the fact that it is tactile and a demonstration in the advertisement. Céline says that since the product does not interest her she does not remember anything about the product and the advertisement. Elisabeth and Gilbert do not look advertisement. Chantal says that iPad seems playful and easy to use. Jean remembers of air and space, the product was drifting; but the advertising campaign did not really leave its mark on his mind. Chantal and Jean remember more about the iPad 2 (colours).

\(^3\) Translated by the authors from: “Renforce les défences naturelles”
When they are asked about their purchase intention Chantal says that she would like an iPad and points out that even if the initial investment for the two products (Actimel and iPad) is different, regarding the Actimel price, she thinks that at the end of the year the budget is the same. Gilbert agrees.

In the Focus group 2, everybody knows the iPad. To describe the product Sylvia spontaneously answers Apple immediately followed by Camel, Julien and Najia say useless. Najia thinks that the product is too expensive. Julien argues on the fact that it is expensive because he does not need it, but the price is ok regarding the product. But he also says that he is waiting for the next products that will come in this range. He thinks that it is a “great promises for the future”. Camel adds that the iPad target a certain category of the population, people who are interested by this technology. Sylvia agreed on that, it is for people interested in high technology. She adds that it is a correct price for this category of product. Najia says that 400€ will be a good price because it is the same price than a netbook the other participants agreed on this fact. They all agreed that at this price they might buy it.

Najia and Sylvia say that the product is not easy to access but Julien disagree he thinks that it is easy to access. Najia and Sylvia are surprise so they ask where he sees the product, he say that is often goes to electronic shop and he sees it every time. Najia and Sylvia are astonished by his answer they thought that they need to go to an Apple store or online to buy it because they do not go to electronic stores and they did not see it. Camel points out that if Apple really wanted to reach a large target they will put it in the supermarket as the iPhone. Najia adds that it is easy to access depending on where you live; if you are living in the suburban area it is less easy. Julien do not fully agree with her, he explains that he received an advertisement on the internet because he has an iPhone for the iPad and he could basically buy it with a “click”.

About the promotion, Najia says that she is sorry but she only has the Guignols de l’Info in mind, which was a criticism explained in the introduction. Julien says that it is the same for him but he remembers advertisement on billboards. Najia and Camel say that the high technology is highlighted on the advertisement. Najia add that she remembers an advertisement where you can see the product in use, which is basically for her typical of Apple, they point out the simplicity and the high technology.

In the Focus group 3, the first thing coming up to Benoît concerning the iPad is “This is a revolution”; he explains that he is referring to “Les Guignols de l’Info”, and then he adds, more seriously, that it is an innovation. For Elise, the first word is tablet, for Clara, Valentin, it is design

According to Jean-Marc, it is expensive, and Benoît agrees by adding that even if it is a good product, the price is too high. Clara and Elise follow them on this point. According to Roxane, the price is not adapted to the quality level. Clara does not completely agree and add that with the iPad you can do several things. Elise specifies that she is in a student perspective when she says that it is too expensive, and Jean-Marc goes further saying that maybe a person who works can afford it and find it useful. Clara notices that among her close friends no one has an iPad, except a friend who received it as a present.

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Translated by the authors from: “C’est une révolution”
The impact of marketing in customer’s behaviour

Influence or manipulation?

According to Clara, when you buy an iPad, you pay mainly the brand and the design. Roxane would not like to spend anything to this product because she thinks that a mini-PC is more multipurpose. Elise follows her and add that she would not spend more than 200€ for an iPad.

According to Jean-Marc, having an iPad is a little bit as having an iPhone, it represents Apple and a life-style promoted by the brand. Roxane and Jean-Marc agree on saying that it is more marketing hit than a really useful product.

They all agree to say that the iPad is easy to find and on the right places. Elise explains that she can find it in the stores where people usually go to buy this kind of high-tech product. Valentin underlines the fact that it is also available on the internet, on the Apple Store. Jean-Marc ask the participants if the iPad is available in supermarkets; thus Elise and Roxane answer that they do not really know; they engage a discussion about the store where you can buy it. Roxane concludes by saying that it is easy to access, even if Clara says that you have to go a little bit further than for an Actimel.

Benoît, Clara, Elise and Roxane say that the last advertisement they remember was on billboards. Jean-Marc remembers that there were big iPads on billboards.

Benoît, Elise and Jean-Marc agree on saying that if they buy those two products it is because they want it; Elise adds that it is not a true need. Jean-Marc explains that an iPad cannot fulfil all the needs that people can have and fulfil with a traditional computer; according to him, people need a computer, but as soon as they have a computer, the iPad becomes kind of useless. For Elise, the iPad is just a luxurious product. Roxane is not convinced by the iPad because she thinks that a mini-PC is more practical but she will continue to buy Actimels because she does not like milk. Benoît concludes by saying that he will maybe buy an iPad but later when the innovation price will no longer be imputed on the final cost.

4.3 Findings on marketing’s perception

The participants have been asked to characterize marketing in three words; the following Table 4.3 summarizes their answers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1 : The words that characterize marketing (made by the authors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus group 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement (5 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale (3 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market’ launch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques of sale and purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products, needs, expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the *Focus group 1*, when they are asked to characterize marketing and explain why, Jean differentiates need and expectation; he explains that through an example: you need a
The impact of marketing in customer’s behaviour

Impact or manipulation?

Sarah Correard

Influence or manipulation?

Calculator, but you expect it to be practical and fit well with what you want. Chantal thinks that marketing gives value to the products, mainly through the advertisement; she adds that marketing creates wants. In addition, Gilbert insists on the fact that every product has to be of good quality. Elisabeth points out that without previous research and study marketing cannot work well. Chantal agrees on the fact that without the studies, it is harder to sell. According to André, marketing starts with a product, and then when the promotion has been done, you need a salesman in order to sell the product to the final customer. Céline differentiates the purchase as a part of the company activity and the purchase as the customer’s buying.

About how they perceive marketing, Chantal explains that marketing manipulates, creates needs. André tempers what she says by adding that instead of creating needs, marketing twists people’s arm. Chantal agrees that sometimes you do not even know a product and then when you know it, you need it, or want it it adds Jean. Elisabeth says that people buy thanks to advertising which bring André to insist on the fact that there is NOT only advertising in the marketing. Chantal recognizes that she is easy to please, a good audience and sensitive to advertising. André points out that there is a lot of lying advertisement, and Chantal totally agrees with him, so do Gilbert. André and Gilbert say that for sale, we are told anything, even lies. Chantal justifies the aim of advertising, which is, according to her, taking a characteristic of the product and amplifying it. She takes the example of the cars, which are always presented as safer and safer, and points out that people have the feeling that they cannot have any accident because the car is doing everything for them (such as braking) and nothing can hurt them; she concludes by saying that it is the same for every product, even just a yoghurt.

In conclusion, for André the marketing is provocative while for Chantal it is very close to manipulation, she insists on a negative aspect of this last concept. After some seconds, André and Céline agree with the feeling of manipulation that can be encountered sometimes. Elisabeth says that she does not let her being manipulated, she resists. Gilbert agrees on the concept of manipulation. Jean says that as long as he is free he is okay, he hates door-to-door sale, it is as an aggression according to Chantal, and he explains that when he needs something he prefers to go into a store. Chantal adds that advertising is not a pressure because in a sense you are free to watch it or not. Jean feels free with his choice. While André and Chantal think that advertising is influencing their buying act, Jean thinks that advertising is just informative. Chantal has the feeling to make her own decisions and André replies that some people do not have the personality to do so.

In the Focus group 2, Najia wrote consumption on her three words to describe marketing. Julien and Sylvia salute her choice instantaneously. She explains her choice because for her marketing encourages consumption. Julien says that it is in this line that he puts manipulation because it is the tool used to encourage consumption. For him marketing is “the art to find the right way to manipulate the crowd to buy a certain product”. He says that it is somehow indoctrination as Camel says. Sylvia thinks that it is basically the principle of advertisement. Camel explains that it is indoctrination because marketing create needs and is followed by people influencing other to buy products. Julien and Camel insist on the money aspect that is for them a big part on the modern society. Sylvia disagree, she does not think that she is forced by marketing to buy anything. She explains that she is conscious that there is a lot of advertisement around her, and products highlight by marketing but she does not think that it push her to buy. Julien contradicts her by saying that she buys organic product, which is typically marketing’s label. She is annoyed by his answer so she insists on the fact that she goes to organic shops. But Julien keeps insisting on the fact that all this
labels; organic, fair-trade are created by marketing. They disagree on this fact; Sylvia thinks that if she does not buy her organic products in the supermarket but in small-specialized shops she is not push to consumption; Julien keeps thinking that it is marketing anyway. So Sylvia does not think that marketing is indoctrination, Camel disagrees taking the example of a family where the children push their parents to buy products because of advertisement. Naja adds that it is not just working on children, she highlights the fact that she does not need a flat screen but she has one, Julien does not need an iPhone but he has one so everyone is encourage by marketing. Julien points out the fact that it is maybe because marketing is part of daily life that they do not notice how much it can push to consumption, they all agree on this fact. Sylvia explains that too much marketing can be annoying and she basically rejects the products that she sees too much around her. She takes the example of the repetitive advertisement in the metropolitan. Camel points out that she is not really representative of the population and basically advertisements, which are repetitive sticks into people mind and encourage buying the product. Naja, adds that advertisement is really all around us in every media so it is unavoidable. Julien gives the examples of advertisements show on screen in oil station, “you have nothing to do, and you wait so you watch”. Camel says that it is also in the post offices. They all agree that at a moment there is too much marketing around them and they saturate.

When they are asked about marketing perception, Naja says that marketing a “huge business” and she really accentuate those words. Camel says that maybe there is too much but now companies need it to differentiate them from competitors moreover with globalization and the large number of choice. Naja says that marketing is just a great tool for people that need to sell something, marketer basically do a great job but Sylvia adds and Naja agreed that it is “too abusive and intrusive” which is annoying and not the aim of marketing which should please people. Julien says that there is a negative aspect on marketing because you are subjected to it all the time; it is not information but motivation. But for him, the other aspect is positive because as an entrepreneur he needs it to sell his products. He explains that in his job, some clients prefer certain cement just because of the color of the packet, fact that he find ironically stupid.

For Naja marketing influences people who think and manipulate the others. Julien asks if influence in not somehow a manipulation which bring to the immediate and adamant answer from Sylvia “No” followed by Camel and Naja. For Sylvia and Camel, influence is pushing someone to think about the different options, or about something. But manipulating is making someone think that he/she needs something that he/she does not according to Sylvia and Naja. Still, Julien wants more explanations; he does not see really the difference. Naja tries to explain by telling him you have an iPhone but he stops her immediately and answers “iPhone is a crap”. Surprise, she asks why he bought it, he explains that when he went to the shop to change his mobile because he needed an agenda on his phone, the sale person told him that there was a reduction on the iPhone which was ending the day after and he should buy it now. So he thought that it was interesting and the phone was fashion so he bought it. The others laugh at him at the same time saying that he was manipulated because the sale person did not propose a choice and did not give him information but pushed him to buy the iPhone. Naja insists on the fact that you do not really realize that you have been manipulated. But for Julien, influence is a first step in manipulation, Sylvia agreed on that point. For them, marketing can be either a manipulation or an influence depending on who is using it and what are the intentions behind.

In the Focus group 3, Valentin thinks that sometimes thanks to marketing, we can manipulate people to push them to buy products while they do not notice they are
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manipulated. He defines manipulation in a sense when consumers are not obviously aware of the real messages from marketers. According to Roxane, one of the most important aspects of the marketing is the promotional part because several supports are involved. She adds that marketing exaggerates in order to cheat the consumer. For Elise, marketing creates needs, and unnecessary desires, she explains that we do not need Actimel, milk could be enough; we do not need an iPad, a computer is enough. She thinks that the role of marketing is to make people feeling that they miss continuously something. She says that if an advertisement is memorable, it is good marketing, if not it is bad marketing. She also insists on the fact that lying in advertising is a kind of manipulation. Clara follows Elise’s ideas about lying and good and bad marketing. She adds that marketing is not only used for products but also for brands itself. According to Jean-Marc, “marketing is clap-trap”5, because marketing can say a lot of things about a product while never saying the real information desired by the consumers. He adds that marketing has to target the right people to be efficient. According to Benoît, marketing is based on the consumers’ needs; it is made to answer those needs. Marketing is a kind of influence because, it says to people how to see the product, from which point of view, marketing guides the consumer in its way. For him, it is related to the image.

To differentiate influence and manipulation, Elise says that when people are influenced, they are more aware of this, while manipulation is more underhand. Benoît and Roxane agree on that point. In addition, Roxane says that the aim of manipulation is to cheat on the consumer; with the influence, you feel free. Valentin adds that both concepts are crossed because consumers would speak about manipulation while marketers and companies would speak about influence.

As an overall view, Roxane points out that without marketing a company cannot work. Elise agrees and adds that sometimes marketing crosses the limits, even if it is to survive and work. Benoît has a larger view of marketing; according to him, even the tiniest company makes marketing. As an example, he says that just smiling is already marketing, you do not need to be a huge company, and you make marketing at your size. Roxane enlightens that nowadays we cannot live without marketing: it is all around us. Benoît continues by saying that marketing is everything that can help to promote, even with a tiny budget. He also points out that marketing is also a component of the company because it is a part of the corporate strategy.

Globally, they agree on the fact that marketing is an influence. And Roxane adds that it is hard for her to define precisely what marketing uses. According to Jean-Marc, influence and manipulation depends on people awareness, everybody reacts on different ways.

5 Translated by the authors from “le marketing est du blabla”
5 – Analysis

In this chapter, we analyse in depth the findings of the focus groups presented in the empirical material. The findings are crossed with the theoretical concepts in order to bring us to the conclusions of this thesis.

The analysis method used is the cross-case synthesis; according to Yin it is the most relevant method in a multiple case study (Yin, 2009, p.156).

5.1 Influence and manipulation

The perceived impact of marketing by the focus groups is mixed, even if marketing provide a value to the products mainly through advertisement they feel push by it to consume. In their perception, the difference between being influenced or manipulated by marketing comes more from the customer.

In fact, they describe marketing as being intrusive, non-avoidable, and constantly present around them. It is one of the result of the neuromarketing study (Pêtre, 2007), we are frequently stimulated by marketing’s action some of them are conscious other not. Noticing, that during the focus groups, people think about the way they have been shouted out consciously by marketing but do not talk about any impact that the customer do not perceive.

Anyway, the feeling of marketing trying to manipulate the customer is really present during the 3 focus groups. They use strong words as “lye”, “indoctrination”, “abusive”, “the art to find the right way to manipulate the crowd to buy a certain product”. The last expression used shows the general feeling, the member of the focus group says “the crowd”, during the focus groups people seems to think that being influenced or manipulated depend exclusively on the customer’s personality.

They start by the acknowledgement that marketing is trying to manipulate but the customer has the ability to stop this manoeuvre, to resist to the marketing pressure. A member of the focus group 2 is more categorical “marketing influences people who think and manipulate the others”. So, regarding the findings influence and manipulation depends on people awareness and their ability to react to all the stimuli their face to.

Even though, in practical their way to behave is a bit different, as example a member of the focus group refuses to accept that buying organic food can have anything related to a marketing strategy, mainly because she does want to feel that she keeps a total control on her purchase decision. Another example, is the member who bought an iPhone and do not like it, his post-purchase feeling influenced the way he present his purchase, and the people on his focus group think that he has been manipulated by the sales representative. But if he was satisfied by his purchase, does the reaction will be the same?

They are all sceptic in regards to marketing, because they mainly see it as a manoeuvre to manipulate and they think to have the ability to protect their selves from that. But in practical, they all had smartphones, laptops... so we can link the perception of being manipulated or influenced to the added value perceived as presented by Pervez (2009).
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5.2 Customer

We can expand our findings by analysing the customers. Indeed, in all the three focus groups, all the participants were potential customers for the two products. Some knew those products, while others did not. Obviously, the choice of the participants (participants seen as potential customers) is driven by their need and want. They will create the demand through those two elements.

We can ask ourselves if those products are really needed, wanted or if marketers and companies just invented them in order to create an unnecessary need. We can see that either with Actimel and the iPad, the participants are unlikely ready to buy those products. But afterwards, we notice that they are convincing themselves that they are making the right choice and their own conviction.

Every participant agrees on the fact that Actimel is a useless product and that they are influenced by advertisement and their own beliefs. When Céline says that Actimel is good for Mamée, she is actually trying to convince herself and the others that the product has a real effect, even if she has no tangible proofs. We encounter the same phenomena with the iPad. In the Focus group 1, only the “youngest” couple knew the iPad (while in the others groups everyone knew it), and they were trying to convince the others that it is a needed and useful product.

Our focus groups revealed that our theory on customer was right. People need things, but the final demand they formulate is completed with their wants, and sometimes companies take the advantage of this by proposing useless but wanted product. Moreover, we noticed that every buying act is related to the customer’s own beliefs and cultural and social factors.

5.3 Marketing

5.3.1 Product

In the three focus groups, all the participants knew Actimel but some participants of the Focus group 1 have never seen the iPad. The reason seems to be the age of the participants of the Focus group 1, more people are old less they seem interested in high technology products.

According to our findings, we noticed that mainly the participants think that the Actimel and the iPad are quite useless. In fact, Actimel is in the average perceived as milk more than a dairy product with an added value. A parallel is possible with the iPad, the participants do not see the added value of this product regarding traditional computers, netbooks and smartphones. Most of the times they prefer to have one of those products than an iPad, in fact, we noticed that most of them, in Focus groups 2 and 3, have criticized the iPad but have iPhones and other types of smartphones.

Nevertheless, there are contradictions in people’s opinion, as example Chantal says that she does not really believe in the benefits of Actimel but she recognizes that it might have a positive effect on old people. We noticed the same contradictions with the iPad, Julien spontaneously says that the iPad is “useless” but few minutes later he explains that for him the iPad is a “promises for the future”.
Even if the products chosen are extreme, we can notice the reactions about them are quite similar. In fact, in the average the first reactions are negatives for both products but when the participants go further in the discussion we notes that the opinions given have more nuances. The phenomenon can be explained by Elise’s sentence, which describes both products as being marketing’s goods. However, the participants are aware of some marketing techniques that surround those products, mainly the communication; anyway some features attract them. For Actimel is the healthy one and for the iPad is the high technology aspect.

5.3.2 Price

All the participants see both products as being too expensive; they consider it is not justified regarding the perceived added value. Julien explains that if he was really sure of the positive aspects of Actimel, he will buy it at this price; but since he is not he does not buy it. In the Focus group 2, Camel proposes a selling price of 1.5€ because of the daily cost of the product. As it is a daily product targeting families it can be a too expensive for a family budget.

In addition, in the Focus groups 2 and 3, they all agree on the fact that the iPad does not have enough price for money value regarding the prices of the netbooks and laptops. In fact, they explain that the perceived added value of the iPad is not convincing enough to pay it at the actual selling price. In those groups, they all agree on the fact that if the product was cheaper they might buy it. Elise proposes a selling price of 200€ for the iPad regarding a student budget. For both cases, they propose a lower price than the actual one and in the average; it seems to be more a question of budget and rationalisation of the want than a question of pure want and/or need.

5.3.3 Place

Everyone agrees on the fact that Actimel is easy to access because it is visible in supermarkets from the smaller ones to the bigger ones. The linear are large and the product is well exposed to attract the potential customer. Actimel, is a low involvement product for the customer so it is basically, habitual or variety-seeking behaviour. In this case, the company uses more a push strategy to call potential customer.

Since the iPad is a high involvement product, the potential customer’s behaviour is either complex or dissonance reducing. In this case, the company uses a pull strategy, people goes to the product. Indeed, the participants highlight that the iPad is less easy to access, even if it is available on the internet. The main reason given by the participants is that customers who access to the iPad already want it, which is not always the case with the Actimel. Sometimes Actimel is just a spontaneous purchase due to the fact that it is well placed in the supermarkets and represents a quite inexistent risk investment, which is not the case of the iPad.

5.3.4 Promotion

The iPad and the Actimel advertisements do not have the same impact on the customer. The groups are able to give details and describe easily an Actimel one. They clearly remember television advertisement; in the average they remember the catch phrase and details about the message. As example, Clara describes an advertisement where a woman is drinking Actimel and a yellow circle of light surrounds her to protect her. In the appendix 3, two Actimel’s advertisements are presented to show the main message of the product.
Concerning the iPad it is vaguer, they remind concepts, colours and features but are not able to describe an advertisement in detail. In addition, they remember advertisements on billboards and on television. They mainly remember that the iPad is easy to use and the advertisements are showing the features in a simple way. The television’s advertisement of the iPad is presented in appendix 4. There we can see the different functionalities of the iPad as looking at photos, using an agenda, reading, looking for an itinerary.

The fact that people do not remember as much iPad’s advertisement as the Actimel’s ones can be explained by the newness of the iPad. It was launch in 2010 while the Actimel is in the French market since 1997.

5.3.5 Marketing perception

We notice changes on the marketing perception regarding the age, in fact the Focus group 1, which is the elder perceive marketing more as advertisement and sales. The Focus group 2 shows more scepticism about marketing; they point out the fact that it is really present in daily life and can be intrusive. The youngest group, the Focus group 3, is the more critics about marketing, they use words as lie or mislead customer to characterize it.

When, the participants discuss about the difference between influence and manipulation, in Focus group 3, Valentin thinks that sometimes thanks to marketing we can manipulate and push to buy products while the customer do not notice he/she has been manipulated. He defines manipulation in the sense when consumers are not obviously aware of the real messages from marketers. The other participants of the group insist on the fact that marketing amplifies to reach customers and mislead them in order to get benefits. The role of marketing is to make people feeling that they miss continuously something according to Elise. They all point out that lying in advertising is a kind of manipulation. Moreover, in Focus group 2, they also do the difference between influence and manipulation by explaining that influence is more making someone to think and manipulation is more controlling someone. For them, marketing can be either an influence or a manipulation depending on the intentions behind. They conclude that influence is a kind of the first step of manipulation. In the Focus group 1, even if they are less critics about marketing Chantal points out that marketing is a manipulation, another participant nuances by saying that instead of creating needs, marketing twists people’s arm.

Anyway, they all agree on the fact that marketing is a useful tool and it is needed to sale products whatever the size of the company is. In all the groups, they think that marketing manipulates only the weakest and everything depends on the personality and the marketing’s perception of the customer. But they are contradictory, Najia summarizes this point well, she explains that even if they are sceptic about marketing they have useless products as a flat screen or a smartphone. So in a way it shows that even if they have a negative opinion on the marketing they still are impacted by it.
5.4 Buying process

The buyer decision goes through different steps we analyse the findings in the focus groups regarding this process for both products: Actimel and iPad.

5.4.1 Actimel

Actimel can be seen as either a habitual buying behaviour or a variety-seeking behaviour. The findings on the focus groups show that it is a low involvement product mainly because of the price. It is a daily product that the people of the focus groups could financially provide at least once. Even though they do not talk about a similar product and they know Actimel, there is no proof in the responses that precise if they do a difference between brands on this type of products.

For the two usual consumers of the Actimel in the focus groups, it fulfils different need. The first one buys it for her mother to help her immune system; the second one drinks it instead of milk. But mainly, it is recognize as a dairy product not fulfilling a particular need but suit the wants and demands of a certain type of population: old people and kids.

The findings shows that people have information related to the product mainly through TV advertisement; the great majority remembers an ad and some concepts introduced. Even though there has been some mixing between several advertisements as Jean-Marc who talk about “Bifidus Actif” has being one of the characteristics of the Actimel when it is for another dairy product. Moreover, they all agree on the fact that Actimel is well represented in linear and easy to find. So the marketing’s reminders (linear, advertisement) often use for this kind of buying behavior had an impact on the focus groups.

In this case, for the two buyers of Actimel, one is the user of the product and the other one buys it for her mother. But this consumer explains her choice by the good shape of her mother that she links to the Actimel’s action. So both of them are satisfied by their purchase, they both perceived an added value.

5.4.2 iPad

The focus groups findings present the iPad as a complex buying behavior product. Firstly it is perceived as a high involvement product mainly because of the price, even though some of the people present in the focus will be able to afford this purchase, the amount cause a non negligible reflection. Moreover, the difference between is perceived by the focus groups, in each of them the main brand of the product “Apple” was enlighten. In fact, the brand was used as an explanation of the price, as example Chantal who precise that the iPad have a reasonable price for an Apple product.

Except the eldest people of the focus groups, they all know the iPad but when it comes to the information related to this product it is less important than for the Actimel. The focus groups were not able to remember clearly an advertisement for the iPad as they have done for Actimel; they principally remember concepts. Noticing, that iPad was not as easy to access for the Focus groups as Actimel. So the purchase of this product will cause more research from the potential customer than for the Actimel, in this case, the customer is more involved. As none of them have an iPad, the authors cannot analyze the buying roles in this case.
Regarding the responses, the iPad seems to fulfill the need of mobility of nowadays. But the perceived value is not enough important to them to bring to a purchase. In fact, the great majority of the focus groups consider that the price is too high for a product that fulfills a need is already reached by netbooks and laptops. Even though the iPad seems to be more practical, the value is not important enough to take the purchase decision. The intention of purchase is more present in Focus group 3, but the financial factor has more importance, as they are mainly students.
6 - Conclusion

Through the analysis, some points were highlighted concerning the cases chosen to answer our research questions and further, our purpose. Actimel and iPad are both seen as marketing products, not really useful. But even though, they still really attract the participants of the focus groups. These two products do not have the same marketing strategy: Actimel’s is more a push strategy while iPad’s is more a pull one. The difference of strategy is more visible in the placement part and not really in the others, because the participants mainly realize that it is easier to buy Actimel; indeed, they noticed that to buy the iPad they need a bigger involvement. From that point, we can answer our research questions.

Our first research question was: from a customer perspective, in a marketing context, what is/are the difference(s) between influence and manipulation? Through the whole process of the thesis, we noticed that manipulation has a disapproved and negative meaning, while influence lets people having more control on their acts. According to the participants of the focus groups, influencing is linked with rationality and manipulation refers more to a lack of people’s empowerment.

Our second research question was: is marketing manipulating and/or influencing the customer during his/her buying process? Regarding the theoretical concepts and the findings of the focus groups, marketing can be either manipulating or influencing. As marketing might have the tools to manipulate the customer through learning his/her psychology, there are still factors that cannot be controlled. But the major issue goes with the ethics of the marketer.

Now, we can answer the purpose of our thesis, which is to demonstrate how marketing is impacting on the customer buying behaviour, by manipulating and/or influencing. In our opinion, and thanks to the researches we did, we are more likely to think that anyone can be influenced or manipulated because everything depends on the intention behind and the added value perceived by both parts. Also the influence or manipulation depends on the ability of the marketer to use properly the right weapons.

Our thesis contributes to enlighten the differences between influence and manipulation in a marketing context, and answer to the major social criticism that has been done in the marketing field. Moreover, the two cases we chose have not been used before and they represent two extreme products that can be found in the market, noticing that the research has been focused on the French market.

As a further research, we can suggest to extend the topic to another perspective, such as analysing if the customer’s marketing perception is not influenced, almost dictated, by the social criticism.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: iPad presentation by “Les Guignols de l’Info”
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Images’ framework created by the authors from http://www.lelombrik.net/videos/34289/la-revolution-apple.htm

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Appendix 2: Original questionnaire in French translated by the authors

1. Présentation du premier produit: ACTIMEL.
   - Produit:
     Quel est le premier mot qui vous vient en tête quand vous voyez ce produit ?
   - Prix:
     Pensez-vous que ce produit a un bon rapport qualité-prix ? Pourquoi ?
   - Distribution:
     Avez-vous facilement accès à ce produit ?
   - Promotion:
     Quel souvenir avez-vous de la dernière publicité que vous avez vu sur ce produit ? Tous médias confondus: télévision, journaux, panneaux publicitaires...

2. Présentation du second produit: IPAD.
   - Produit:
     Quel est le premier mot qui vous vient en tête quand vous voyez ce produit ?
   - Prix:
     Pensez-vous que ce produit a un bon rapport qualité-prix ? Pourquoi ?
   - Distribution:
     Avez-vous facilement accès ?
   - Promotion:
     Quel souvenir avez-vous de la dernière publicité que vous avez vu sur ce produit ? Tous médias confondus: télévision, journaux, panneaux publicitaires...

3. Achèteriez-vous ce(s) produit(s) ? Si oui, pourquoi ?
   (Si nécessaire: Est-ce parce que vous le voulez ou parce que vous en avez besoin ?)

4. Ecrivez 3 mots qui caractérisent le marketing pour vous.
5. Comment percevez-vous le marketing ?
6. Selon vous, le marketing est-il une influence ou une manipulation ?

1. Presentation of the first product: ACTIMEL.
   - Product:
     What is the first word that coming into your mind when you see this product ?
   - Price:
     Do you think that this product has a good value for money ? Why ?
     How much would you spend to buy this product ? Why ?
   - Place:
     Do you have easily access to this product ?
   - Promotion:
     What do you remember from the last commercial you saw on this product ? Including all the medias: television, newspapers, billboards...

2. Presentation of the second product: IPAD.
   - Product:
     What is the first word that coming into your mind when you see this product ?
   - Price:
     Do you think that this product has a good value for money ? Why ?
     How much would you spend to buy this product ? Why ?
   - Place:
     Do you have easily access to this product ?
   - Promotion:
     What do you remember from the last commercial you saw on this product ? Including all the medias: television, newspapers, billboards...

3. Would you buy this/these product(s) ? If yes, why ?
   (If necessary: Is it because you want it or you need it ?)
4. Write 3 words that characterize marketing, according to you.
5. How do you perceive marketing ?
6. According to you, marketing is more influence or manipulation ?
Appendix 3: Actimel's advertisements

Advertisement 1:

Advertisement 2:

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6 http://www.studiostrygge.com/illustration/danone_actimel_2_fr.php
Appendix 4: iPad’s advertisement

Images frame created by the authors from:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNNIfNXGjRc&feature=related