Communication Strategies within Fitness Centre

Antoine Tocco, Nicolas Blanchard

Strategic Marketing with Independent Project

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This thesis aims at studying the impact of communication techniques developed by fitness centre on their customers. Basically, the authors elect this subject as they know well about gym activity since they are themselves member of a fitness centre.

By adopting a deductive approach, the authors aim at comparing theoretical concepts and researches with a questionnaire and study they will conduct.

At the end, thanks to the empirical data collected, the authors will be able to identify what communication tools are the most efficient towards both members and non-members of fitness centre.
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The authors, Nicolas Blanchard and Antoine Tocco are proud to present their thesis about the impact of communication strategies developed by fitness centre. Of course, they work on their own but the finality of this paper is also due to the precious help of few people. This is why, the authors decided to highlight their involvement in the thesis.

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1/ Introduction to the Thesis

“Fitness centre: a place where you go to exercise, for example by lifting weights or using other equipment” (Cambridge dictionary).

1.1 Historical background

1.1.1 Fitness’ roots

The notion of fitness has its roots in the ancient Greece, where the word gym defined the public places where athletes used to train for events like the Olympic Games. This dimension was really important at that time. The objective from all countries was to present and train the most athletic and powerful athletes. With the fall of the Greek system, the practice of gym disappeared. Thus people did not find any interest in practising physical training for centuries, since life hardness provided far enough pain.

1.1.2 Come back in the US

Nonetheless many years after, in the 19th century, school and colleges in the USA started to create a first derivate of fitness centre called Gym, in reference to gym class. This trend used to include a gym hall where youngsters practised sports as well as social games. Unfortunately, the political context integrated an ethnical requirement to take part of such activities.

Later in 1930, a new trend began in America: Boxing Gyms. The exercise of boxing always required a great physical condition. In order to increase their performances, fighters started to create private gym clubs, where the boxing exercise was surrounded by several side activities with the purpose of building up fighters’ capacities (punching ball, jump rope…). Then boxing was not anymore their only activity. They were also focusing on developing their muscles in order to be the most athletic as possible.

1.1.3 Modern vision

Finally, fitness centre started their activity in the US during the sixties. At that time, the economic situation was good and people were eager to discover new things. However, gym activity was not as much successful as it is today, especially in Europe. Few people were
going to the gym daily and it was far from mass consumption, particularly since fitness centres were still competed with fitness TV shows.

The big change came with the start of the 21st century. In fact, since the year 2000, the number of fitness centre is increasing in the whole world. Everyone is concerned by this new phenomenon, students, working persons and even retired people. All of them are going to the gym for different reasons. The big majority is doing so to stay in a good health but other persons use the gym to complete their original sport or just to escape their daily routine.

Fitness centre started to be integrated within offices, since employers cared more about employee’s health. At that time, people started to care a lot about their appearance making the success of these fitness centres. The medical world as well as young people fighting obesity also started to recognise the advantages of such centre. This increasing interest for gym clubs results in 50.2 million memberships in 2012 only in the USA.

1.1.4 The case of Europe

In Europe, the phenomenon is developing rapidly. From west to east, fitness centre are emerging in many countries but especially in big towns. In these major cities, the number of new adherents is growing every day. This is the case in France, as well as in Germany but also in Poland. In fact, one of the authors went there for few days and observed many fitness centre especially from the company Mc Fit in Warsaw.

In Sweden, authors are themselves members of a gym centre at Halmstad University. Such as many students, the authors go there three or four times a week. Furthermore, this centre is not the only one here in Halmstad. Despite the fact that it is a small town, the city counts around five or six places to train and each of these places faces a big success.

Therefore, the authors can easily confirmed the fact that Europe is facing the same evolution that the USA, ten or fifteen years ago. Fitness centre are almost opening at every corner. This new trend fits perfectly the new way of life of Europeans workers. It makes it easy for them to train the whole year despite their professional life. It also fit the will from the government to increase the number of people practicing sport to reduce obesity.

However, university still need to follow the trend. This is the case in North Europe (Sweden or Norway for instance) but southern countries such as Spain, Italy or even France offer pours
facilities in the schools. Students can get a membership but gym clubs are often too small or too old to attract them. As a result, these fitness centres stay empty during the whole year.

1.2 Problem discussion

Observing this evolution, the authors were wondering how fitness centre create and sustain their success. This is why, they found interesting to study how fitness centre are processing to maintain and develop their popularity. More precisely, the authors wanted to know:

What are the communication strategies which attract the most both members and potential members of fitness centre?

1.3 Purpose

Asking this question, the authors wanted to obtain the opinion of customers and non-customers of a gym. The vision will be set from the point of view of members and non-members of fitness centre. The idea is to identify the communication tools which work the most towards these people. At the end, by comparing and analyzing the data with theoretical assumptions; one must be able to evaluate the impact of communication strategies on both members and non-members of fitness centre.

1.4 Theory to be tested

What is important here is what the authors know and what they want to know. Before writing the thesis, the authors searched and found information on the topic. The idea was to highlight several theoretical models to be tested. Basically, the authors elected three different models to conduct the study. The final goal is to compare what is stated in the books with what will be observed in the case studies. This comparison between theory and findings will permit the authors to draw constructive conclusions.

According to Kotler et Al (Provost, Barringer; Armstrong), segmentation, targeting and positioning is the first step in a well prepared communication plan. They present how to segment and target the audience as well as how to position the offer. This is why, the authors aim at comparing classic STP strategy with the one developed by fitness centre. Is the model presented by Kotler et Al adapted to the gym area?
Then, the authors will focus on the communication mix and its effect on the customer. Advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing (…) is the basis of a communication strategy (Kotler et Al, 2009). Then comes a question, between all these tools, which one is the most efficient in the fitness sector?

Here is the purpose of the research, test and verify the efficiency of each communication tool in the fitness environment. At the end, the authors want to know the major steps in the development of an effective communication plan (Armstrong, 2012 and Buttle, 2009).

Finally, the last model concerns the characteristics of the service described by Gronroos (2007). According to him, to be efficient, a service must fit particular characteristics. The first one is that you do not promote a service the way you promote a product (Gronroos, 2007). In the thesis, the authors will verify if the fitness centre studied fit these characteristics. Is it necessary to respect Gronroos definition of a service to be successful in the gym area?

1.5 Process introduction

In order to answer the previous question one will go through four main steps. Our objective is to show possible answers to the problematic thanks to the combination of both theoretical and practical point of views.

In the very first part, the authors are going to develop a theoretical approach. It includes two main dimensions. The first one will be about presenting the main communication strategies that have been created and used by firms in our near past. To achieve such goal one will use several well-known authors and knowledge the authors acquired during our courses. One will mention of course the communication mix by Kotler and the STP strategy. As the authors do their researches among fitness centre, they will also need information about communication around services. What are the main differences between promoting a product and promoting a service will be an interesting discussion for them.

The authors consider this part as an introduction to the fitness world, which has particular features we may not find in other fields of work. This part has for purpose to initiate the reader to communication strategies within the fitness context and will serve as a basis for the whole study which will be conducted.

In a second time the authors will talk about methodology. The purpose of such a part is to enlighten the reader regarding choices they made. One will describe the method used to
answer the research question. One will also explain how such ideas came to our mind and the process followed to build up this structure.

In a third subsection the authors will discuss why this approach is relevant, as well as potential limits that may arise during the process. This part is important to us as it transmits to readers the state of mind the authors had when answering the research question settled earlier. At the end of this part, the reader must be able to know how the authors will process from the beginning of the theory to the answer to the initial question.

The third part, settles the beginning of the practical part of the thesis. This part will be ruled by three main acts. The first approach will be the study of communication strategies in two different fitness centres namely Sats and Actic. The authors aim at interviewing managers or supervisors from these fitness centres in order to collect qualitative data. Basically, one aims at asking eight to ten pertinent questions to collect an interview between fifteen or twenty minutes. By learning about the experience of supervisors, the authors will have a better idea of the communication techniques which are in use in fitness centre.

Once this first act done, the authors will spend time in analyzing the answers collected from the interviews. The idea is to compare answers from both fitness centre and see which techniques are the most quoted by supervisors. This part will have a huge importance as it will give to the authors the knowledge they need to build a strong and reliable questionnaire. In fact, by analyzing the answers collected, the authors will know what pertinent questions to ask in the questionnaire.

Once established, one will spread the questionnaire to the most people they can. The main goal is to collect at least two hundreds answers. At the end, this questionnaire will be the major tool to answer the research question. This is why; its creation must not be neglected and will be carefully thought by the authors.

The fourth and final step the authors will go through is maybe the most important. This stage will be called the analysis. It will aim at looking over the whole empirical data collected and see what the big tendencies are over the answers.

First one will recall the theory and the authors’ view over communication strategies in such centre. This recall will be made according to the theoretical chapter which has been conducted at the beginning of the thesis.
Then, the authors will confront each notion with the data collected from the customer’s opinion. This reunion of theory and practical will permit to see what communication techniques are working and which ones are not. The authors will also see to which tools members and non-members are the most sensitive.

A last subsection will be dedicated to the expression of the author’s view towards the subject. This way they will be able to express their vision of the topic in comparison to the one they had before the thesis. Basically, it will be a conclusion of the whole research remaining the audience the most important findings. Of course, the authors will bring to the reader a complete answer to the research question asked previously. Beside of it, the authors want to build some recommendations to fitness centre. The main idea there is to see how they could improve their communication skills in order to attract more and more people. At last, the authors will mention the limitation they faced in redacting such a thesis.
2/ Methodology

The following chapter aims at describing the process used by the authors to tackle the research question. The purpose is to show the reader why the authors decided to treat the subject this way, clarifying how they did at each step. Therefore, the chapter will cover the research approach as well as the strategy developed. It will present how data were collected and how it have been analysed. A final point one will cover is a rapid assessment of the research quality and reliability.

2.1 Research approach
2.1.1 A philosophical approach

“The research philosophy you adopt contains important assumptions about the way in which you view the world”, (Saunders & al, 2009, p108).

It seems important to the authors to start by talking about their philosophical approach as it explains how they decided to solve the research question. According to Saunders (2009) the philosophy approach can be visualized like an onion. It would be composed of 6 layers: 2 for the philosophy, and 4 for the data collection sources and methods. This onion allows anyone who is writing a thesis to have a clear view over his objectives and the nature of his researches.

Following this idea the authors defined their view was pragmatic, with a deductive approach, supported by experimentation, case studies and surveys, and finally going through a mixed methods. The authors will go deeper in the explanation of each factor all along this chapter.

The work of Burrel and Morgan (1982) defines the author’s view as “ontological”: “The researcher’s view of the nature of reality and being” (Saunders & al, 2009, p.119). The two authors consider that the purpose of such strategies is the research of multiple; external approaches to best answer the research question. Hence the research leads to mixed data collection techniques including both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

One may find this approach really interesting in order to answer the problem mentioned earlier in the introduction. The multiple views allow us to cover the subject as a whole. Adopting several points of view seems important to the authors, particularly since business issues are more and more complex.
2.1.2 Definitions: deductive/inductive approach

Two different options are available to thesis authors when designing their view on how to articulate their researches. Should they start with theoretical basis and then search for empirical facts (Emory, 1991) or the other way around. As the approach here is considerably more deductive than inductive, the authors will spend more time in defining this first notion compared to the other.

- Deductive vision:

The first possibility is called the deductive approach. The process is to start with theoretical reasons that are then confirmed by world real facts, proofs. So deductive approach requires two conditions for the theory to be accepted; facts must show that the theory is valid and true.

Robson developed five stages a deductive approach goes through. The first one is deducing theoretical hypothesis (Saunders & al, 2009). For example the following chapter can be considered as our own theoretical hypothesis over communication strategies used in fitness centres. Then Robson talks about expressing those hypothesis, through operational terms. By operational terms Robson means through measurement methods (Saunders & al, 2009). Then the third stage is to test the hypothesis previously made. Once tests have been made, the research should examine the outcome, hence deciding whether the theory should be confirmed or redirected. The final stage consists in reshaping the theory under the light of our findings.

While reaching the end of this process, a conclusion is considered untrue if and only if, one premise is untrue, or if one argument is invalid (Emory, 1991). As a consequence, the conclusions of a deductive research reside in the validation of its premises.

When considering this process one can see several main deductive approach characteristics. First deductive approaches imply causal relations between variables. Such relations will then appeal for quantitative data as a practical expression of the hypothesis (Saunders & al, 2009). Deductive researches also use reductionism. In order to help the readers understanding major issues, they may be reduced to simpler cases including similar features.

- Inductive vision:

“To induce is to draw a conclusion from one or more particular facts”, (Emory, 1991, p.151).
Inductive researches do not use relationship links to draw hypothesis the way deductive ones do. Instead researchers make observations of physical facts, then searching for possible explanations. Newton discovering the gravitation principles after observing an apple falling is a particularly well known example of inductive reasoning.

The main particularity of inductive approaches is the possibility for more answers (Emory, 1991). Indeed inductive approaches leave room for flexibility by nature. There is less deduction, which is reducing the frame of work, leaving aside some causal effects. Inductive approach tends to deal with relatively new subjects or at least subject with few literatures. The approach and explanations flexibility compensate the absence of proper literature (Saunders & al, 2009).

2.1.2 How the authors use deduction and induction in this thesis

The authors definitely prioritized a deductive approach for many reasons. First reason was the number of information available concerning communication strategies. This topic is of major importance in the study of marketing. Moreover fitness centres are subject of a great dynamism nowadays. The field has never grown so rapidly and is the subject of more and more articles. The combination of both subjects enables us to access a wide range of information and literature. It makes possible the creation of a framework and then hypothesis, which can be verified through a deductive process (Saunders & al, 2009). The authors did not choose an inductive approach as it usually requires more time and increases risks such as missed causes (Saunders & al, 2009).

The authors mostly used a deductive approach, but from time to time used a combination of both. John Dewey calls this process “Double movement of reflective thought” (Saunders & al, 2009). Dewey in his model describes three phases; induction generation while witnessing facts, drawing explanation attempts and deducting related conclusions. Indeed on several occasions the authors discussed on facts they originally noticed in fitness centres they are member of, generating assumptions over the facts, then deducting possible conclusions. This process helps the authors a lot in the idea generation phase. The flexibility offered by the induction process allows new, original ideas to be assessed.

These techniques are called systematic combination and involve two processes (Dubois, 2002). The first being the matching between theory and reality, process the authors talked about in the previous paragraph. The second is called direction and redirection.
The purpose is to use the impact of data coming from multiple sources in order to test and modify the theoretical view (Dubois, 2002). The systematic combination helps one to constantly confront the theoretical part with the reality.

2.1.3 The authors concept vision

Concepts are the ability to transpose information in form of images or experiences (Krishnaswan, 2010). It seems important for the authors to introduce this notion as it will be used in the next subsection. Hence concepts are defining the way the authors see the world. The main concept one uses during this thesis is “concrete concepts” in opposition to “abstract concepts” (Krishnaswan, 2010). It means that all information is according to the authors, leading to a result which will be in a manner visible in the concrete world. An example could be the recent attention that customers receive from marketing people. It leads to the multiplication of feedback demands from companies towards their customers. Following this trend, fitness centre saw the arrival of feedback “boxes” at their entrance, but also the use of group mailing asking for feedbacks.

2.2 Research strategy

2.2.1 Descriptive research (Interview)

The objective is “to portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations” (Saunders & al, 2009, p.140).

A very first objective the research strategy takes is to describe a theoretical and practical picture of the subject. The authors want to introduce the people they are interacting with, describing their environment of work, the way they make decisions. Hence the descriptive part does not exist only in the theory, but is also integrated in the beginning of our data analysis. Such description goes further than a simple facts presentation. It is rather a base on which one build deductions and conclusions. Doing so helps the authors avoiding the typical comment Saunders (2007) calls: “That is interesting… but so what?”

2.2.2 Quantitative and qualitative approaches

The data collection is considered as the hypothesis testing phase since it provides empirical proofs. It was developed especially for “experimental research” (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The type of collection techniques will have a great influence consequently.
The authors are going to start with a first look on quantitative definitions. Saunders (2007) defines a quantitative research as data collection techniques or procedures that generates or uses numerical data. They are characteristics of surveys or structured questionnaires. The purpose is to use the data in a statistical way. The proofs that support theories will be given through the numbers, the repetition of similar answers in a questionnaire for example.

Questionnaires could be built on the internet now. They are rapid to create and easy to share since the sample targeted is pretty young and connected to such media. These media helped the authors to follow the evolution of answers (number, origin, members or non-members) and make appropriate decisions (when to shut down the access to the survey for example).

Qualitative researches are slightly different. “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their world” (Merriam, 2014, p.5). It includes data collection techniques and procedure that use non numerical data. It refers to other means than numbers, based on words and reactions. It often includes a combination of secondary and primary data, joined to multi or mono method of collecting data (Saunders & al, 2007). Qualitative researches are then focusing on interpretations of what is said. It searches to design a meaning on each experiment (Merriam, 2014).

Hence one can say that qualitative researches focus on what people say and why do they say that, while quantitative ones will see people claims as statistics, groups. The analysis of the outcome represents the justification of theoretical assumptions.

A final possibility is to use a combination of both techniques. Doing so allows the reduction of each technique influence over the outcome, even though such influence is hard to quantify. In the same way it provides the benefits of both techniques (Saunders & al, 2007). A first way of combination is to use quantitative and qualitative research in parallel. It means you are using both techniques at the same time. Another approach could be sequential. This time, the researcher is using quantitative and qualitative techniques separately, one after the other (Saunders & al, 2007). Proceeding this way set up a clearer limit between each utilisation.

For this thesis the authors decided to use a combination of both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Like Saunders (2007) mentioned, this way of doing things reduces the methods influences, but also both are complementary, adding something specific to the analysis.
2.2.3 Why such combination?

This settled, the authors also decided to use a sequential combination technique; the qualitative part being the first technique the authors used. Indeed they put in place some interviews with fitness centre staffs in order to collect their claims, and have their point of view. This increases the reliability, helping researchers to be focused on current problems centres face (Saunders & al, 2007).

In a second time the authors are using a quantitative approach in order to have a look at the other side of the barrier, the customers. A survey strategy was adopted which is frequently included in thesis using a deductive approach with a “how”, “why” or “what” research question (Saunders & al, 2007). It allows the collection of significantly more data in terms of quantity. Then the statistical analysis will enlighten results. The authors analyse them with the interviews outcome. However, the authors want to remind the audience that the most important for them is to collect data from customers’ point of view. Interviews of fitness centre will just permit to build more reliable questionnaire.

Hence the objective of such combination is to build a thesis including both points of views. The authors wanted to conduct interviews with fitness centre in order to get in touch with their offers, structures and their decisional processes. Once done, the authors built a questionnaire to understand customers’ perception regarding communication techniques and their efficiency. Using qualitative methods helps the authors to get a better understanding of companies’ situations. Then the quantitative part is used to collect opinions regarding these situations. It seems important for the authors to develop such strategy since this combination helps to cover the subject entirely.

2.3 Case studies
2.3.1 Introduction

Case studies are the most common way used to confirm theoretical assumptions. It is shaped in different way, each type having specific goals, used for specific situations. Case studies hence require a theory which set priorities for the data collection (Yin, 1993). Hence case studies try to draw an experiential environment in which the reader can validate or deny assumptions. (Harland, 2014, section 4) says: “It must bring the reader as close as possible to the experience being described”.

Following such idea means case studies aim at providing physical evidence in the first place,
those evidences creating a global picture, an example. Thus the theory introduces a concept, case study then tries to understand the impacts of such concept over the topic (Harland, 2014). The author is doing so through the analysis stage, comparing the theory and procedures in place (Yin, 1993).

This analysis will interpret and explain noticed facts enlighten by the case study. Thoughts that analysis intervenes only in theoretical part or conclusions are deeply untrue. The analysis is involved in the entire research process, including data collection as this stage can be a source or a proof maintaining the analysis possible (Harland, 2014).

### 2.3.2 Single or multiple case studies

A first case study’s feature researchers have to decide on, is the number of case studies involved. Any research using case study for its data collection, includes one or several case studies. Any research using one case solely is called single case study approach. Cases including several sub case studies are called multiple case study approach (Yin, 1993). The authors choose for this bachelor thesis a multiple case study approach.

The reasons that led this choice are simple. First a multiple case study enables similar patterns to be identified and analysed. The repetition of case studies may help us to find differences or similitude in the way centres communicate depending on factors such as location or size (Yin, 1993). The selection of such cases will depend on the availability of examples to be analysed. The choice of the proper cases is crucial, as the diversity and similitude in cases will influence the case study interests. The availability of many fitness centre as well as their great diversity encouraged us in the selection of a multiple case approach.

### 2.3.3 Holistic and embedded case studies

A second choice researchers have to make is whether they use a holistic or embedded vision. Holistic visions define case studies that are highly concentrated around qualitative approach. Such approach would use more narrative presentations of facts, focusing on phenomenological descriptions.

On the other hand researchers can choose an embedded approach. It defines cases that on the contrary do not focus only on a qualitative approach but use a combination of quantitative and qualitative (Scholz & Tietje, 2002). The embedded vision is the one used in this thesis. Authors made this choice in order to be able to combine several visions and cumulate the
advantages of both qualitative and quantitative data. It appears also that such vision is respecting the philosophy adopted until here.

2.3.4 Explanatory or descriptive case study?

A final decision that must be made when designing a case study is whether this objective is to be descriptive, explanatory or explorative. The exploratory form of case studies is the one that gave case studies its most notorious reputation (Yin, 1993). The main characteristic of such study is that, it takes place even before researchers have defined the research question and the preliminary hypothesis. Moreover such structure may not use a case study when collecting data once the research question has been found.

Another type of case study is the descriptive one. The purpose for such case studies is to provide a description of observed phenomena. Such cases go far beyond than non-theoretical thought like: “let’s collect information on everything” (Yin, 1993). Such cases are providing illustrative results. It means the analysis that follow the data collection provide results by interpreting previous observations. In order to confirm theoretical assumptions descriptive case studies will observe and describe causal facts (Yin, 1993) Descriptive cases may also confront several cases in order to find similar patterns to each one.

A third and final type of case study is the explanatory. This particular type has for objective to link causes and effects. The main question it tries to answer is: does a similar cause have different outcomes? (Scholz & Tietje, 2002)

Thinking this way, Graham Allison designed one of the most well-known explanatory case studies to explain the Cuba missile crisis. He came to the conclusion of three possible theories thanks to the alienation of explanatory and descriptive cases. The main purpose of his research was the provision of alternative explanations (Yin, 2014). The case study is then considered as a theory testing, but in a qualitative manner (Sholz & Tietje, 2002).

It is this particular approach that you will be able to find within the next chapter. It seems that capacities of explanatory cases jointed with descriptive ones will enable the authors to have an interesting view. Explanatory studies are also often use for how and why research questions (Yin, 2014). Our data collection techniques also brought us to such decision. Indeed the choice of questionnaires and interviews means authors are not simply describing a fact from secondary data. But instead they are using primary data, searching for tendencies, seeking issues and potential revolutions. In consequence the process is more or less divided in
the same way explanatory cases are described. One will regroup several causes, opinions and records which will be then analysed to determine the outcome, potential consequences.

2.3.5 Actors involved

The authors decided to involve two main actors in the study: Sats and Actic. Both were selected as they are important fitness companies on the Swedish market. The two of them also own facilities in Halmstad where the authors lived. This presence allowed the authors to meet managers and employees easily. Hence comparisons between customers’ experiences and what they saw there were possible.

Finally the two companies are interesting to study because of their difference. All along the study, the authors noticed the different profile those two companies have. In consequence, it was really interesting to evaluate those oppositions and analyse the consequences they have over the adopted communication strategy.

The selection process was simple. The authors used internet resources on the first place; using companies’ visibility to spot all the fitness centres working in the area. Sending emails did not work really well since the response rate from companies was really low. In order to get answers quicker, the authors decided then to go in facilities and ask directly to managers for their participation. Actic and Sats both gently accept to be part of the study.

2.4 Interviews

2.4.1 Why choosing interviews

The authors rapidly oriented their choice toward interviews as they provide an inside opinion. Interviewees are people from our choice, who are answering specific questions, during a face to face meeting. This way one can collect primary data this study is interested in, economically and efficiently.

Managers are also more willing to answer questions through interview since they have a control over the interpretation of their answers. They can also directly correct any misunderstanding or misinterpretation from the interviewers. Managers are also attracted by the possibility to receive feedback or advice from interviewers (Saunders & al, 2007).

Another interest the authors have in collecting data through interviews is the personal contact. People are more likely to spend time to explain sensitive subjects such as their strategy when
they already met the people they are giving this information to (Saunders & al, 2007). It is also more interesting for the authors to be able to explain the context in which the information is needed. Interviewee may also help the authors in resolving off topic issues that they probably would not have talked about with a questionnaire.

2.4.2 Structure types

Our first mean of data collection is the proceeding of several interviews within different fitness centres. The purpose of such interviews is to understand the attitudes, decisions and strategy adopted by directly asking to deciders (Saunders & al, 2007). However an interview may be conducted in different ways. The authors are going to describe them in the next few paragraphs.

A first way an interview may be directed is structurally. It is the most rigid way of proceeding. These interviews are using the same questionnaires at each time. The interviewers read each question in the same order with the same tone of voice and then record the answer (Saunders & al, 2007). These interviews are called respondent interviews since it is the interviewer who directs the meeting. Using this frame of work provides a base which is similar everywhere. There is no adaptation and the only differences will be in the answers. Structured interviews are currently used with close questions. The purpose is to record quantifiable data. Questions and answers are not developed and there are few places for expression of opinions.

Most of the time such interviews are conducted in order to categorize the information for a statistical use.

A second type of interview is the semi-structured interview. This structure is less rigid and includes modifications in the questions, the order or the tone of voice used. Open questions and opinions are asked more frequently (Saunders & al, 2007).

The extreme opposite to structured interview is the unstructured interview. Such interviews are most of the time very informal. You may use this version in order to explore a general subject with your interviewee. This is why this type of interviews is also called in-depth interviews. The types of questions asked may differ broadly depending on the moment of the interview, as well as the topic you want to explore. This interview is called informant interview as it is the answers of the interviewee which guide the interview (Saunders & al, 2007).
2.4.3 Special focus on semi structured interviews

One can rapidly remind that semi structured interviews are guided by open questions mostly, asking interviewee to provide information as well as his own opinion. The questions may differ in their order, tone of voice and structure depending on the interviewee. The organisation of the questions may follow a list of themes rather than a strict number of questions (Saunders & al, 2007).

Semi structured interview are particularly important for the authors as it is the process they use for each one of their interviews. Such process is really interesting as it provide qualitative data (Saunders & al, 2007). It is helpful to compare adopted visions since one may recognize general features in all interviews. Nonetheless specifies may arise during the interview, depending on the answers as well as the interviewee requirements.

This structure also gives more power to the respondent than the interviewer, hence experience sharing is possible. The interviewee can provide the interviewer stories he find relevant to illustrate his words. On the other hand the presence of a basic structure helps us not going out of the frame, resulting in off topic, useless information. This structure fits well an explanatory case since it helps linking variables together (Saunders & al, 2007).

2.5 Questionnaire
2.5.1 Basic structure

“Questionnaires are one of the most widely used means of collecting data” (Rowley, 2010, p.308). Questionnaires are different from interviews because of the absence of any direct interaction between the interviewers and the interviewee.

It has been said that this absence may lead managers to be more careful with the information they deliver. But the counter part for people using such tools is the ability questionnaires have to contact a large scale of people (Rowley, 2010). This is why questionnaires seem useful for this thesis. The authors want to use it as an opportunity to collect customers’ advice on the communication techniques used by their fitness centres. The necessity to collect several advices to make meaningful conclusions led the choice to use questionnaires. Moreover, questionnaires have the ability to introduce many different topics rapidly. In a dozen of questions, interviewers are able to ask people some facts (age, income), attitudes, behaviours (purchasing habits) or feedback (Rowley, 2010).
Furthermore, questionnaire will be an important part of the author’s study as customer’s opinion is the key to answer the research question.

2.5.2 Main characteristics

Even though questionnaires can take many forms, they keep the same characteristics most of the time. The first characteristics that can be found in almost every questionnaire is the research for large samples. Many times when a questionnaire is used for collecting data, the main purpose is to get as many answers as possible, in order to draw generalizations from a meaningful sampling (from 100 to 1000 answers). Questionnaires are a process to analyse data quantitatively (Rowley, 2010).

The definition of the sample is also important when talking about questionnaires. The authors cannot make any generalization if the sample is not diversified a minimum (Rowley, 2010). The sample must represent faithfully all categories of people who are involved in the process. In this case, the samples must represent all customers’ categories (youngster/elderly, frequent/occasional users…). The authors designed a young sample, more concerned by sport and less by injuries or diseases. Hence the sample is mainly concentrated between 20 and 30 years old. Nonetheless the oldest respondent is 87 and 25% of the panel is older than 30 years old. The authors also designed a sample involving 60% of non-members and 40% of members. The goal is to have a look over the two categories and understand how communication strategies affect both groups.

Another important characteristic of questionnaires is the questions asked. The questions you ask must be in relation with the research question. There are several types of questions people may use. Close questions for example. They defined questions accompanied with different options the reader must choose from. It does not ask for any justification and the answers are generic. On the contrary opened questions involve interrogations where readers must answer with their own words. The respondent is asked to answer questions according to its own view and concepts (Rowley, 2010). Types of question will have an influence over the response rate, as shorter questionnaires tend to cumulate more responses.

2.5.3 Strategic approach to questionnaires

Questionnaires have an analytical purpose. They are used to understand the relation between variables but doing so requires a bigger picture of the situation. This is why when talking
about questionnaires, the number of responses become crucial. There are many tips the authors may use to increase this factor, and finally the quality of their survey.

Self-completion questionnaires are very effective. They involve close and short questions which are easy to answer. The number of question is also limited in order to avoid boredom from respondent. Such questionnaires are efficient because they are easy to spread and cheap to distribute. Self-completion questionnaires do not have the interviewer’s effect issue as well as variability problems. Such benefits help researchers making effective analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2011). It is particularly important for the authors as our working period is very short.

In the end one can say a good questionnaire involves an important response rate. Such rate can be reached with a short questionnaire involving a combination of close questions and few open ones. Time spent on each answer must be shortened and respondent must be aware of the research purpose (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This is for this particular reason that effective questionnaires should include a short explanatory cover page.

2.6 Data analysis

Because this thesis is composed of multiple data collection techniques, its analysis must include several aspects too. As the authors previously said, the thesis adopts a deductive approach where the data is supporting theoretical assumptions.

As a matter of fact a first approach is the qualitative analysis. It analyses the outcomes of interviews. The purpose here is to understand what has been said and the meanings of such statements. Such analysis aims also at discovering regularities and potential links. A final step in qualitative analysis is about theory reflection (Saunders & al, 2007). This step is crucial, particularly because it is a base for conclusions. It is during this step that researcher will take the theory and try to make some reflections over what is confirmed by data and what is inflected.

Our analysis also uses categorisation. The purpose of categorisation is to regroup data in homogeneous categories. Categorisation is based on pattern recognition. Indeed there is no possibility to create appropriate groups if no common pattern between factors is recognised. Once researchers build the appropriate categories, they process relationships recognition between each category. The goal is to understand what factors influence each category and how does it affect the theory assumptions. Finally researchers develop a hypothesis which is
based on both theoretical assumptions as well as the conclusions provided by the data analysis.

This thesis has the following characteristics according to Saunders (2007). Its structured data includes a deductive approach with procedural analysis.

Like previous parts said, the data collection was made of a qualitative part, represented by interviews but also a quantitative part. In fact the use of questionnaires provided the thesis some quantitative data. In order to analyse those data the authors could not use the same practices they did for the qualitative part. The use of statistics was the base of everything. This thesis used statistics as pattern recognition as well as a tool to create homogeneous categories out of the important amount of data collected.

2.7 Research quality

A final consideration in case study designs is to create designs with construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Yin, 1993). According to him, the basis of every case study is the validity and the reliability of the data collected. Therefore, if the authors want the conclusions to be correct and exploitable, they need to insure the reader of the quality of their researches. In order to reach this quality, one followed different methodology steps before building questionnaires. These different steps permitted the authors to explore the topic in order to develop strong and trustful case studies.

The first step is obviously the theoretical part. In fact, when the authors chose the subject and the research question, they did have a global idea of the topic of course but missed some important elements. Thanks to Kotler et Al, Provost and Gronroos books on the subject, authors now know the most important details about the topic.

In fact, the authors first learnt how work the global communication process and how it must be built to attract customers. Then, they studied all the communication tools which are available to firms; therefore, it settles how they function, their differences and value for fitness centre.

Last but not least, the authors focused on the specific characteristics of the service and to which extent they are different from the one of the product. They also studied the main oppositions between selling a service and selling a product. Finally, one learnt that experience given to the customer is what creates competitive advantage when dealing with services.
The second step is linked with the need of concrete information about fitness centre’s communication. After general approach, preparation of case study needs to be focused on specific details (Shwarz, 2007). In this situation, authors need to talk with managers involved in fitness centre communication. So first, they discussed and prepared a list of important questions to ask.

These questions have to be central because the answers collected will shape the validity and reliability of the case study. In fact, the knowledge of these managers on the topic will help to develop and build more “professional” questionnaires.

Here are the questions that may be asked. Of course, these questions may change in function of the answers the authors will collect. “Do you find it really different to communicate about a service rather than a product; in which extent is it different to communicate about sport; Are you establishing communication plan or communication strategy for the whole year; how can you describe your communication strategy in order to attract customers; what are the communications tools that you judge as the best to attract customers; is there some specific communication techniques regarding fitness centre; are your employees aware of these techniques?).

In order to reinforce the validity and reliability of these researches, it has been decided to ask these questions to two different managers from different fitness centres in Halmstad. The authors know that the more sources there are, the more reliable the study will be (Schwarz, 2007). In fact, with two interviews, the authors will be able to compare answers and elect the best way to approach the subject. Then by mixing the different answers, the authors will build a strong and reliable questionnaire.

2.8 Research design

In order to build an analytical part that correctly answers our research the authors must have a relevant collection data technique. It is mentioned earlier the desire to conduct both a systematic combination approach as well as a mixed quantitative/qualitative collection techniques. The following part aims at explaining why the authors are using such strategy.

The authors, in order to collect relevant data, choose to combine qualitative and quantitative collection means. The interviews are qualitative, while the questionnaire aims at bringing a subsequent number of answers, therefore an important number of data.
This choice mainly aims at confronting the firms’ activity with the impact they have over customers. Indeed the authors decided to postpone the publication of the questionnaire after the interviews realisation. By doing so, the questionnaire will be adapted to firms activities, issues and challenges. Then the objective of the questionnaire is to provide the authors with customers’ point of view regarding fitness centre activities. It aims also at providing answers regarding the reasons that bring customers to subscribe to fitness centre. Thanks to such managers’ answers and the questionnaire, authors will assess the importance of factors such as friends, special offers and so on. In the end it will possible to design conclusions and recommendations on communication techniques which please the most customers.

The aim is to understand which communication strategy influences the most customers in their fitness centre choice. Hence doing interviews allows the authors to understand how the extra goods proposed, the direct interactions or the price strategies are broadcast and how far it influences customers. At the end the authors must be able to answer the research question by identifying the key elements to attract non-members and retain members of fitness centre.

2.9 Concrete Interviews

The following part aims at introducing the interviews conducted in different Halmstad fitness centre. This part will present the structure of the interviews as well as the different expectations the authors had before conducting these interviews. The different hypothesis settled here may be compared with the conclusions drawn in the empirical data part.

2.9.1 Preparation of the questions to ask

As explained in the methodological chapter, the authors decided to conduct different interviews in different fitness centre in order to collect qualitative data. These “dialogues” with managers or supervisors will permit to have a better knowledge of the subject. In fact, people answering these questions are specialized in this field for a long time now. Consequently, their answers help and recommendations will give strength to this study.

At the beginning, the authors wanted to conduct three interviews in three different fitness centre in Halmstad in order to have multiple sources. The initial goal was to get answers from Sats, a fitness centre chain known all over Sweden, Actic, and IDROTTS Centrum from Halmstad University.
The two first ones (Sats and Actic) were really easy to reach. Employees were available and open minded, therefore, it was quite easy to set up an appointment with local supervisors. However, the authors faced many refusals from IDROTTS Centrum. Local managers told that they were too busy to answer our questions. Therefore, the authors choose to mainly focus on Sats and Actic interviews.

Furthermore, knowing that the authors are members of Halmstad University gym (From 4 to six workouts a week); they already know how the centre works and have a global idea about their communication strategies. This is why; get a feedback from other fitness centre was the first priority.

Once the authors had the appointment with Sats and Actic, they started to work on the questions to ask. The interviews had to be linked to the topic: “What are the communication strategies which attract the most both members and potential members of fitness centre?”

After a lot of reflection and analysis, ten questions were selected. The authors wanted it to be clear and rapid for the managers to answer. The first goal was to create something no longer than 20 minutes. Something short has two main advantages. Firstly, it makes it easy for interlocutors to answers and secondly it makes it easy for the authors to transfer the interviews to paper version. Once ready for a constructive discussion, the authors went from one centre to another one to conduct the interviews.

Of course, the authors briefly introduced the purpose of the study and the thesis topic. They informed them about the finality of these researches and ensured them that their motivation was only academic.

Then, the first question asked was about general information: “Could you rapidly introduce your fitness centre?” The purpose was to have basic knowledge such as date of creation, number of employees/ adherents, prices and so on. This knowledge was important to make sure the fitness centres interviewed were big enough to be studied.

Once authors had enough information, they introduced more focused questions. They wanted to know how Sats and Actic mainly communicate towards their customers and what kind of tools are they using for it. One also wanted to know in which ways is it different to communicate about a service rather than a product (Gronroos, 2007).
This is why the questions also mentioned extra goods which are sold by fitness centre. In fact it seems interesting to study oppositions between communications towards fitness activities and extra goods. Here are the questions asked to get more information about it:

- “How would you describe your communication strategy in order to attract customers”?
- “Are there some specific communication techniques that work especially for fitness centre and could not be used elsewhere”?
- “For you, what is the most efficient tool, I mean to attract customer? If you have to choose just one tool”?
- “Are you proposing extra goods to your members? (Clothes, towels, foods or drinks) How are you communicating about it?”

These questions were tightly linked to our research topic. This is why; the authors made sure to collect all the information needed. In fact, the answers collected in this part will represent the basis of the questionnaire. These answers were the keys needed to build a pertinent and useful questionnaire. This is why interviews were as focused as possible.

In a second time, the authors wondered by which process, major decisions were taken. It is important for them to know how decisions are made by managers and what kind of thought is there behind it? In order to get this information, the following questions were asked:

- “How are you controlling the whole communication process”?
- “Who is taking major decisions regarding communication strategy?”
- Are all the employees aware of these decisions”?

In a third time, the authors built questions concerning feedback and how they are used by fitness centre. These questions were important in the way that managers know what works towards the customers thanks to feedback. Therefore, feedback is a very important element in the construction of a solid and performing communication strategy.

- How are you dealing with the feedbacks of the customers?
- Is there a way to collect it and then analyse it?
- Once you have the feedback, how are you acting to correct it?

Finally, the authors became interested in the visual and design of fitness centre. Thanks to the researches from theoretical part, one now knows that visual aspect is an important element in the seduction of the customer. Visual and design is one of the first way to communicate for
fitness centre. In fact, it is the first communication tool that customer will see. Therefore, visual will represent the first impression of customers towards the fitness centre. This is why the following questions were asked:

- Is the disposition of the machines and the space thought by your team?
- Are you thinking that the visual is important in a fitness centre, people are coming, it looks good, is it a reason explaining why they take the membership?

At the end, the authors collected two interviews around 20 minutes each. Both are very interesting as supervisors/personal trainers did their best to help. Their knowledge on the subject was very instructive as it gives authors a crucial advantage in the creation of the questionnaires.

Of course, the authors are a little bit disappointed that they did not get the chance to interview the gym they are going in (Halmstad University). However, after reflection, they found that two interviews were enough to conduct the study. Complete transcriptions of the interviews can be found at the end of the thesis.

2.9.2 Hypothesis regarding answers to the questionnaire

Thanks to the two interviews conducted and the answers collected, one can already imagine the answers questionnaires will provide. These are just hypothesizes which will be confronted to the real answers at the end of the study.

First, now that interviews provided more information, the authors can deeply confirm the impact of communication strategies on customers in fitness centre. Communication is part of their recent success and growth as well as the first step in attracting customers. This is why, one can expect customers to answer the same thing. One can expect them to recognize the impact of communication on their behaviour.

Authors already know that some of them will answer: “yes, communication changed my behaviour toward fitness centre”. These people will probably be the one who know about marketing and communication notions. However, one also knows that some people will answer: “Definitely not, communication has nothing to see with the fact that I am attending a gym; the only reason is that I am keen on sport”.


Obviously, this answer is not a lie as many people are practicing gym for personal reasons. However, behind this motivation, there is a choice to go to one fitness centre and not another one. This choice can mainly be explained by communication aspects such as designs, word of mouth or promotional offers. Then, communication has always an impact even when people answer “no” to the question.

Secondly, now that the impact of major tools with supervisors has been discussed, it is easy to imagine what will be the most efficient ones in the opinion of customers. What the authors learned is those fitness centres are not using extravagant techniques to attract their customers. They are acting at small level to make it the most efficient as possible.

Therefore, when asking in the questionnaire “How did you get in touch with the fitness centre you are going in”; friends and word of mouth are expected to be top answers. One also knows that experience is very important when selling a service; this is what the authors observed in the theoretical part with Gronroos (2007) researches. This is why; free trials and free sessions may also be top answers. Finally, everyone knows prices often represent a big part in consumer’s decisions. This is why; promotional offers and attractive prices may also be preferred in the questionnaire.

On the opposite, big advertising campaigns such as telemarketing or radio spots may not be mentioned as important in the answers. In fact, interviews showed that direct marketing or social networks are much more efficient regarding fitness centre. What is important for them is to build and reach a kind of community. In this way of thinking, mass media is inefficient. Therefore, if it is rational, one can imagine that people answering the questionnaire will not dedicate importance to it.

Another supposition concerns the sale of extra goods. As the supervisors told the authors, it represents only a small part of their business, one can imagine that the answers in the questionnaires will say the same thing. In other words, few people are expected to buy extra goods at fitness centre. On the same point few people are expected to pay attention to communication around these extra goods. According to these hypothesis, answers will clearly show that the sale of extra good is only an additional source of revenue for fitness centre; answers will show that it is nothing big for them.

Last but not least is about the feedback and its proportion. Here it is very difficult for the authors to imagine the answers the questionnaire will get on this point. One knows that
feedback is important in the growth of fitness centre. Supervisors told that they collect it as much as possible and they try to fix it as much as they can. However, it is very complicated for us to know in which proportion people are giving feedback to their fitness centre. One can imagine how they are doing it but not how frequently. This is why; the authors do not have precise expectations on this point.

2.10 Concrete Questionnaire

The following part introduces the questionnaire that have been created, shared and analysed by the authors. This part aims at presenting the way authors collected quantitative data and the outcomes they obtained. Since interviews and hypothesis regarding this questionnaire have been already presented, the authors will now focus on the realization of the questionnaire. In order to do so, one will first remind why the study uses a survey. On the second hand the authors will describe the process used in the construction of the questionnaire as well as how they shared it. Then one will rapidly present the main information collected. Finally one will introduce rapidly the difficulties that arise.

2.10.1 Why a survey?

Within the methodology part the authors explained that this thesis is currently using both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data. The interviews had for objective to provide a clearer view of communication and marketing tools used by companies. Based on this picture, the questionnaire aims at providing customers’ advice. The purpose at the end would be to confront both views in order to link facts and figures together.

Rowley (2010) explained that a questionnaire is the most used tool to touch a large number of people. Moreover questionnaires are easy to spread and costless to produce. When lots of answers are required in order to build a representative image of the situation, then questionnaires are necessary since they are far less time consuming than interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Hence it appears as the best way to collect a lot of data from customers, in order to generalize tendencies.

Another advantage of surveys is the absence of direct interaction (Rowley, 2010). Respondents are not influenced by the way authors pronounce or the order in which questions are presented. Then Bryman & Bell (2011) explain surveys do not have to deal with the variation problem. Indeed unstructured or semi structured interviews may face difficulties
regarding the topic variation. All along the interviews different subjects may be introduced, varying on the answers provided. It creates difficulties when comparisons are needed. In a quantitative research, the need for statistical analysis requires the same topics to be treated. No variation can be allowed since the authors will need similar bases to spot differences between customers, and reasons for such changes. Hence surveys allow authors to talk about many fields of study while preserving the research from any kind a variation problems (Rowley, 2010).

2.10.2 How did the authors create it?

The creation of the survey is a joint work between the two authors. In order to create it, they first created a draft on their own, designing each question, possible answers and their order to structure the survey. Then the questions were sent to their thesis supervisor for potential corrections. That is why the core structure of the survey has been corrected three times before anyone answered it. The approval of the supervisor was crucial to insure the reliability of the questions and their proper coverage of the research question.

The entire survey is divided in several parts which aim at covering the relation customers have with their centre. In the next paragraphs the authors will introduce those parts and why they decided to include them in this survey.

- Respondent information

This very first part of the survey is general. It is dedicated to the respondents. The purpose is to know his basic profile. It includes the age, the gender and the nationality. These questions aim at knowing the sample. This part ends with a crucial question, asking whether or not they are going to a fitness centre. The answer to this question will influence the rest of the survey.

- First interaction study

This part includes questions 5-6-7. Here the purpose is to understand where people are going to the gym as well as how they get in touch with their centre. This part focuses on the very first interactions people have with their fitness club. They also have to categorize the importance of several criteria when deciding where to go for their workout.

- Customers’ habits
Questions 8 to 11 are concerning the customers habits when going to the gym. It includes the frequency of their trainings, the average time spent there as well as the interest they may have in the different services proposed. This part is not directly linked to the subject authors are studying, but it will be really useful in comparing differences. The purpose is to record factors that can prove the effects of communication. For example longer sessions or the use of personal training could be proofs of an effective communication strategy.

- Additional expenses

For the questions 12-13-14, the authors decided to focus on extra goods. It is particularly important as they do not represent an initial need for the customer. But instead the authors wanted to understand how fitness comes up to create a want. Hence this questionnaire asks the respondent to measure the degree of importance of several communication techniques used to attract customers toward these product. Measuring the efficiency of such goods may help us to understand to what extent fitness centres are communicating with their customers.

- Two ways communication

Questions 15 to 17 treat one of the most important parts for the firms: feedback. This part in a first time tries to understand how often companies get feedback from their customers as well as how do they get them back. Then in a second time this part focuses on the customer evangelism. This marketing strategy has for objective to transform their customers in volunteer sales force. People talking about the company are the best communication tool for a fitness centre. Thus the authors decided to assess the popularity of such methods. A part of the analysis will be devoted to the study of such factor with the community creation strategy. The end of this part focuses on the importance of two ways communication.

- If the respondent is not a member

This part being shorter than the previous ones, one will treat it in a single sub section. Indeed this part of the questionnaire includes only 2 main sections. First it aims at understanding if people may be a target or not of the firm. Understanding why they are not going to the gym as well as if they would change their mind.

Then the second part is trying to assess the relations people have with fitness centre without going there. The main interrogation is about what image of fitness centre they have according to what they know from previous interactions.
Both members and non-members are asked to personally explain their point of view regarding the importance of communication techniques within the fitness business.

2.10.3 How did the authors spread this survey?

- **Online techniques**

The technologies of information and communication enable anyone to spread his survey all over the world. In order to take advantage of such possibilities, the authors created a Google form to create surveys. Thanks to this form, the authors have been able to share the questionnaire all over social networks (Facebook and Hotmail mainly). These techniques enable various profiles to answer as well as it increases the response rate since more people can see the document. Sport groups gathering athletes on networks such as Facebook are also helping a lot since it linked dozens of members in a single “place”. Five days after the first post on the internet, around 80 answers were recorded, including people from France, Germany, Sweden or even Gabon.

- **Offline techniques**

These online techniques worked pretty well. After 10 days on the internet, around 140 people answered the form. However, the authors were asked also to go into fitness centre that have been interviewed in order to provide the questionnaire to customers. Hence after asking these centre their agreement, it came out that Actic denied the demand while Sats gently agreed to take part in.

The authors then spent three hours at the entrance of the fitness centre, asking customers for their participation. The outcome was very interesting since several nationalities answered, as well as people from different age and even from different fitness centre. The authors cumulate around 10 high quality answers in a single afternoon.

The general outcome of this questionnaire shows that online techniques and particularly social networks help authors to get nearly 200 answers. Offline techniques provided less answers but of high quality. Customers were directly explaining their answers, making comments. The predominance of internet also helped the authors to get answers from really different people all around the world.
3/ Theory (Research)

"Marketing communications are the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers - directly or indirectly - about the products and brands that they sell" (Kotler & Keller, 2009). It can also refer to “coordinated promotional messages delivered through one or more channels” (Business dictionary).

In order to persuade customers, companies (including fitness centre) are using a specific process to create, develop and reinforce their brand experience. This communication process had been divided into seven steps by Paul Provost, the CEO of “6P Marketing” (a company helping small entrepreneurs to develop their businesses). Of course, the author’s argumentation will also be reinforced by author’s researches and definitions on the subject.

3.1 Communication process and customer approach

According to him, the first step of the communication process is the “understanding of the audience”. He clearly states that “the better you know your audience the better you can appeal to their interests” (Paul Provost, 2006). Nowadays, the strategy is to turn from a market orientation to a customer orientation (Patrick Shannon, 2000). At the, end, what is created is a “customer driven marketing strategy” (Earl Naumann, 2000 p1). Before communicating, companies must know who the customers are and what are they expecting? Why would they buy from this company rather than another one? (Paul Provost, 2006).

The second step is “uncovering a unique selling proposition”. According to Paul Provost (2006), here is the main benefit that, “when communicating effectively”, will increase the sales of a company. Concretely “it focuses on a unique problem that you solve better than anyone else”. Other specialists (Kotler, 2007) are calling it the “competitive advantage”; that is to say, an advantage that the company has on the competition (Kotler, 2007). If this competitive advantage is strong enough, then the audience will act accordingly. This is why; Paul Provost (2006) describes this step as “the centre of the whole communication strategy”.

The third step is referring to the brand “look and feel”. This is not far from what Kotler (2007) call “the physical evidence” in the three additional P of the marketing mix. “From logos to business cards, the brand must speak to the customer in a relevant manner” (Provost, 2006).
Everything must be thinking in a way that matches the customer expectations towards the company. Companies must keep in mind that a perfect and pleasant physical appearance will push the customers to stay in (Naumann and Shannon, 2000).

In a fourth step, the company must ensure that the “whole message is consistent”. (Paul Provost, 2006). Logo and slogan are not enough; brands must create “key positioning statements to make the message clear and understandable by the customers” (Provost, 2006). According to 6P Marketing Company, the customer needs to deal with key words, short paragraphs or sentences describing the company.

Quoting Kotler (2007), a complete communication plan is all about inform, persuade and remind the customer about the products on sell. Naumann and Shannon (2000) developed Kotler definition explaining that communication is a precious tool in the development of customer’s loyalty. At the end, a communication plan can be displayed by different tools. Between those tools, companies can develop “website, banners or flyers in order to transmit the right feeling to the right customer” (Paul Provost, website 6P Marketing, 2006).

These four steps are summarized by Kotler et Al (Armstrong, Barringer, Ireland) as the STP Strategy (Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning). Step one; “better know the audience” results in segmenting the market and targeting the audience. Indeed, segmentation, “by dividing the market into specific groups”, gives a better view of the audience while targeting will permit to reach easily the most valuable customers (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010). Step two, three and four are both referring to the positioning of the brand.

3.2 Segmentation definition

Reading Principles of Marketing (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p73), segmentation refers to “dividing the market into specific groups of consumers who share common needs and who might require separate products and / or marketing mixes” On the same way, Professor Sally DIBB is defining it as “the process of grouping customers in markets with some heterogeneity into smaller, more similar or homogeneous segments” (Marketing briefs, p56).

According to Barringer and Ireland (2010), the most important question here is “What groups of buyers are similar enough that the same product or service will appeal to all of them? (Chapter 5)” The idea is to refuse mass marketing by developing an adapted approach and an adapted offer for each market segment.
According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010), an effective segmentation must be measurable, accessible, substantial, differentiable and actionable. On the same idea, Barringer and Ireland define effectiveness as “focusing on those people you truly have a shot at selling to” (2010, chapter 5). To focus well, companies can use different variables which can be “geographical, demographical, psychological” (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p73).

According to the book Principles of Marketing (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010), segmentation has many benefits which help companies to reach customers. First, segmentation divides the market which permits to gain a better understanding of the customer needs. Then, specific and distinct marketing mixes can be created to propose the best answers to each segment’s expectations. Third advantage, segmentation allows companies to use a focused communication strategy. In fact, specific channels can be used to reach different groups of customer. Depending on the customer, the tool to convey the message will not be the same (Barringer and Ireland, 2010, c5). Last but not least, segmentation enhances differentiation between companies by developing distinctive and adapted positioning for each segment (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010).

3.3 Targeting definition

“It is the process of evaluating each market segment's attractiveness and selecting one or more segment to enter” (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p73). By this process, companies decide on which segment to prioritize their marketing efforts. According to Barringer and Ireland (2010, c5), “it refers to differentiate some aspects of marketing for different groups of customers”.

There are four potential way to target customers. The first one is the undifferentiated marketing also known as the mass marketing. It is “a market-coverage strategy in which a firm decides to ignore market segment differences and enter the whole market with one offer” (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p225). “It evolved along with mass production and involves selling the same product to everybody” (Barringer and Ireland, 2010, c5).

The second one is the segmented marketing. It is “a market-coverage strategy in which a firm decides to target several markets segments and design separate offers for each” (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p226). Third way is the concentrated marketing also known as the niche marketing. It is “a market-coverage strategy in which a firm goes after a large share of one or few segments (niches)” (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p228).
Niche marketing is like “shooting a rifle; you take careful aim at one type of customer with your message” (Barringer and Ireland, 2010, c5).

They define segmented marketing by comparing the opposition between the strategy of Ford and General Motors in the twenties. The first one “was keen on mass production and mass marketing”. Then the second one “divides the market considering the needs and wants of the customers” (Barringer and Ireland, Chapter 5, 2010).

Then, it is no surprise that, “in 1950, General Motors overtook Ford as the nation’s top automaker”. According to Barringer and Ireland (2010, c5), targeted marketing is now the key to attract the customer.

Last one is the micromarketing. All about “developing products and marketing programs to the needs and wants of specific individuals and local costumers segments” (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p229).

However, the authors must remind the reader that targeting strategies are not just about preferences from companies and brands. In fact, Kotler and Armstrong (2010) identified four external criteria which influence these strategies. The first one is the resources availability. Companies must compose with their economic situation as far as some targeting options are more expensive than others (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p232).

Second point is the structure of the market (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010). Is the market already fragmented into small segments or not? This structure will guide and orient companies’ targeting strategy. The model used by the competition must also be considered (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010). The main question is “how do they target the market and what can we do differently”.

This confirmed what one said before; differentiation has become a key element of success in today’s society. Last point is about the product life cycle. Depending on which step the product is (growth, maturity, or decline for instance); the targeting strategy will not be the same (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010). In fact, it is obvious that a company will not act the same way facing a growth or decline stage.

Therefore, companies segment the market dealing with their environment. However, when the segmentation is well conducted, benefits can be several: avoiding competition on same customers, developing new offerings, identify early adopters and focusing on the most profitable customers (Armstrong, Barringer and Ireland).
3.4 Positioning definition

Positioning is the act of “arranging a product to occupy a clear, distinctive and desirable place relating to competing products in the minds of target customers” (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p74). For Barringer and Ireland, it is just “how consumers perceive a product relative to the competition” (2010, c5). According to these definitions, positioning is not what the company creates but more what it offers to customer’s mind. Reaching such position is a central objective for firms as it provides substantial profits with a position remaining generally stable. Positioning strategies involve not only functional characteristics but also product additional features. It means the name; the packaging and even delivery techniques will have an influence over the customer’s mind (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010).

In the end, such characteristics have an influence on the customer’s perception of the firm. The objective being to provide customers the benefit they expect before purchasing. For example Red Bull is positioning as a young, top of mind firm in the new energizing drinks market.

They definitely target youngsters (more willing to try new products) and position according to this, actively promoting through “funny” TV ads, sport sponsorship and videos (all these means being highly present in young people’s life). To ensure its position in the mind of the customers, Red Bull can use a tagline. “A tagline is a catchphrase designed to sum up the essence of a product”, (Barringer and Ireland, 2010, c5).

Finally about positioning Johnny K. Johansson (1985) in Journal of International Business Studies said: “A product can be graphically resented as a point defined by its attributes scores”.

Following this leads to the creation of a two axes map. Each product receives a score on each dimension according to its attributes. Thus they occupy a position on the map; if two products have similar scores, it means they have close attributes in customer’s mind. This map is called the perceptual map, and is divided in several zones, each of them referring to a specific characteristic (Johansson, 1985).
3.5: Communication marketing mix

The fifth step, presented as the most important one by Kotler is the elaboration of the communication marketing mix. This is “the particular combination of marketing tools that work together to communicate the marketer’s message, to achieve the marketer’s objectives, and to satisfy the target market” (Kotler, 2007). Another definition can be found as the “specific blend of tools that the company uses to persuasively communicate customer value and build customer relationships” (Armstrong et Al, 2008, chapter 14).

These tools are numerous and companies must choose the one which will best fit its audience. In fact, there is not standard marketing mix that will work for everyone (Kotler, 2009). Using Kotler (2009) researches on the subject, the authors will clearly define each marketing tool presenting their characteristics and impact on the customers. Considering that the thesis deal with gym activity, the authors will also briefly mention how fitness centres are using these communication tools.

3.5.1: Advertising

The first one is advertising which is a “public mode of communication transmitted simultaneously to large number of people” (Kotler, 2009). On the same way, Armstrong et Al mentions advertising as “any paid form of non personal promotion of ideas, goods and services” (Armstrong et Al 2008, chapter 14). Therefore, the first one highlights how broad the message can be while the second one underlines impersonal characteristics.

Anyway, advertising has many advantages; first, it permits to reach a lot of people rapidly and efficiently. Then, the messages can be repeated as much as the advertiser wants. Finally, the media makes it easy to design the message using a scenario, images and sound.

Nevertheless, the drawbacks are also numerous. The most important ones are certainly the cost which is very expensive and the fact that advertising does not allow dialogue between companies and its audience (Kotler, 2009).

Anyway, it is not a communication tool that is very used by middle range fitness centres. In fact, the cost is often too high for them who privilege local publicity. This is why; they are more likely to use personal and face to face communication strategies. (Alme Maria, 2013).
3.5.2: Sales promotion

Sales promotion, for instance can be considered as one of these “personal communication tool”. Kotler defined it as a “distinct invitation to the consumer to do the transaction in a short period of time” (Kotler, 2009). In fact, it pushes the potential customer to join the brand experience.

In his definition, Armstrong et Al (2008, c14), mention “short-term incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service”. These incentives can be “discounts, coupons, displays, or demonstrations” (Armstrong et Al 2008, c14). Demonstrations can easily be linked to the “free weeks” trials proposed by fitness centre. It gives a first feeling to the customer; he can join the movement and enjoy his workout for free. However, what the customer does not know is that from the moment he entered the gym, he became a member of a community.

3.5.3: Public relations

Third tool is referring to public relations and publicity. The first one can be described as an organization systematic plans and efforts to control and manage its image (University of Wisconsin, River Falls). Armstrong et Al (2008, c14) proposes a more complete definition as “building good relations with the company’s various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up good corporate image, and heading off unfavorable rumors, stories, and event”. To do so, companies can use “press release, sponsorships, special events or web pages” (Armstrong et Al 2008, c14).

Publicity is a “type of promotion that relies on public relation effects of a new story” (University of Wisconsin, River Falls). Here, the way to communicate is not obviously mass media but much more personal communication supports such as banners, flyers or derivate products. Fitness centre are keen on this tool. In fact, it is a cheap way for them to target local customers who cannot avoid seeing it (Alme Maria, 2013). At the end the goal remains the same than advertising that is to say create an attractive and pleasant image for the future customer.

3.5.4 Direct marketing

If the company wants more privacy with its customers, she can use Direct Marketing. In fact,
it is a communication tools that permit to convey a message directly to the customer (Kotler, 2009). On the same way, Armstrong et Al (2008, c14) mention “direct connections with carefully targeted individual consumers to both obtain an immediate response and cultivate lasting customer relationships”. The support of the message can be a mail, an e-mail or even a text message. This strategy gives the feeling to the customer to be personally targeted by the company.

With direct marketing, the benefits are opposed to the ones given by advertising. With advertising, Armstrong et Al (2008) mentioned non personal techniques. On the opposite, with direct marketing; the communication is straight from the company to one particular customer. In fact, companies using this tool will reach very fewer people but more privately and efficiently.

Recent data showed that Americans are receiving 247 commercial adverts per day, that can be conscious or not. Fitness centre being a seasonal tendency (after Christmas, before summer); it takes rarely advantage of impulsive shopping. Thus advertising such as billboards, TV ads may not worth the investment, unless the company has a sufficient visibility and resources to stand the investment. Some direct strategies including face to face, flyer prospect will have more impact, and is often privileged by middle size centre.

Globally, fitness centre aim at developing their direct marketing. Most of the time, they obtain customer’s personal information when they register for the free week trial. (Alme Maria, 2013). These information are often very complete including name, age, sex, address, cell phone number and e-mail. Thanks to this information, fitness centre can contact customers as much as they want in order to promote their business.

3.5.5: Personal selling & promotional events

The two last big communication tools are personal selling and events organized by firms. The first one involves a “live, immediate and interactive relationship between persons”, which leads to dialogue (Kotler, 2009). This dialogue is highly developed by fitness centre. The primary goal with personal selling is to “make sales and build customer relationships” (Armstrong et Al, 2008, c14). Most of the time, companies develop “sales presentation, trade shows or incentive programs” (Armstrong et Al, 2008, c14). If the relationship is close and trustful enough, then, brands will obtain fidelity from their customer.
Talking about personal selling, fitness centre also developed personal training which remains one of their first strength.

The second tool, namely “event and experience” is defined by Kotler (2009) as “entertainment and events as well as activities that create novel interactions of consumers with product or brand”.

These events can permit to gather every customer around the brand forming a big community. Events are also there to seduce new potential customers who may hesitate to join the experience. For fitness centre, these events can be numerous (exhibition, competition, meeting and so on). They will permit to reinforce the link between adherents themselves and members of the staff (Alme Maria, 2013).

According to Kotler et Al, all the major communication tools that brands use in the fifth step had been listed below. Of course, this list cannot be exhaustive as far as companies are always trying to develop new strategies in order to differentiate themselves from the competition.

The most important for the firms remains to know how they can reach their audience the most efficiently. Where do they spend their time and their attention are two questions that companies must solve if they want to communicate efficiently. Therefore, it is no surprise that Kotler and Armstrong (2010) mention “identify the audience” as the most important step of an effective communication.

Of course, the choice of the marketing mix will also be influenced by the budget of the firm. In fact, the authors saw previously that some communication tools (such as the advertising) are much more expensive than the other ones.

After having elaborated the marketing mix, companies must design an effective measurement system (the sixth step). In fact, the whole communication strategy must be measurable in order to see what is working and what is not: “whatever the medium and message, ensure that your communications are measurable” (Paul Provost, 2006). This measurement can be e-mail’s open rate, social media exposure or direct mail response rates. At the end, it will be very easy for a company to see where the efforts must be concentrated.

3.6: Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The last step, but not least, is the CRM (Customer relationships management). This step is defined by Kotler and Armstrong as the “overall process of building and maintaining
profitable customer relationships by delivering superior customer value and satisfaction” (2010, p37). According to this definition, CRM helps anticipating needs, optimizing profitability thanks to an improved customer satisfaction.

“Strategic CRM is focused upon the development of a customer centric business culture. This culture is dedicated to winning and keeping customers by creating and delivering value better than competitors”. (Francis Buttle, 2009 p4).

Indeed customers are yours as long as they want, and from companies’ point of view, they represent the only source of profit. (Francis Buttle, 2009). Hence companies use CRM in order to enhance customers’ loyalty, judged crucial at this day and age.

According to Torben Svane (IT teacher at Halmstad University, Sweden) it costs six times more to get a new customer buying than keeping a regular customer. Loyalty also raises selling odds from 15% up to 50%.

As a consequence, companies are nowadays adapting CRM strategies to new tendencies. In order to do so, firms face the necessity to personalize the mass communication strategies previously developed. This tendency is based on the following philosophy: see each customer as being unique and make them feel that way.

However, “many businesses claim to be customer centric and customer focused but a few are”. (Francis Buttle, 2009, p5). “Customer centricity competed with other business logics as product oriented, production oriented, sales oriented or market oriented” (Francis Buttle, 2009, p5).

Another strategy currently developed is the community aware strategy. This strategy responds to the weak loyalty power corporations have compared to communities. Consequently, companies aim at creating new environments in which interactions with customers are essential. Such interactions bring companies and customers to an affective level, which permit companies to “own” customers as long as the firm remains close to buyers’ expectations. This strategy is crucial in the fitness world as 67% of gym members never use their subscription (Source: data collected by statisticsbrain.com and presented by usanews.com).

In order to maximize the profitability level, Gartner () created a model which involves four categories which follow customers all along their relationships with the firm. First is the customer selection, which is close to market segmentation one already mentioned. Then, the customer acquisition, arguing which channel should be use to effectively reach customers.
The third step described in this model (Gartner) is the customer retention. Here it deals with how to improve the relationships length, and which strategy to adapt in order to do so.

Finally the Gartner model ends with the customer extension. It argues how many products customers already bought to the company, and how is it possible to influence customers to buy more (optional products, services…).

If the authors now summarize their findings, one identified six major steps in developing an effective communication (Armstrong et Al, 2008). In the first place; the company must identify the target audience. Then, the company must determine the communication objectives. In a third and fourth position, the company must design a message and choose a media to display this message (communication mix).

In a fifth position, the company must select the message source. At last, the company must collect a feedback in order to know how to improve its communication (CRM) (Francis Butlle, 2009).

However, the authors must not forget that gym activity is all about a service proposition. Therefore, the strategy to attract customer is not the same. This is why, using Gronroos researches (2007), the authors will now observe the difference between selling a product and selling a service.

3.7 Marketing and communication about services
3.7.1 Service definition and characteristics

A service can be defined as “any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another one which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything” (Gronroos, 2007). Mainly, there are four specific characteristics about services that make it different from a product. First, as one mentioned before, a service must be intangible. It means that services cannot be seen, tasted or felt before purchase.

Second characteristic is the variability. In fact, the quality of a service depends on who provide it, when, where and how.

After, there is the inseparability. Contrary to a product, a service cannot be separated from his or her provider.

Final point is the perishability of services as they cannot result in the ownership of anything or anyone. Therefore, they cannot be stored or stocked for later sales or use.
Reading all these characteristics, one cannot deny that a service is fundamentally different than a product. This is why; selling a service is different than selling a product. On the same point, a service cannot be promoted as one promotes a product. Therefore, strategies deployed by brands are obviously different.

### 3.7.2 Product versus service, different strategies

In his book, “*Service Management and Marketing*” (2007), Christian Gronroos distinguishes four major strategic perspectives; the core product perspective, the price perspective, the image perspective and of course the service perspective. In order to better understand the difference between both, the authors will develop core product and service perspective.

With the core product perspective, “quality of the product is considered to be the main source of competitive advantage” (Gronroos, 2007). The product must fit in itself the expectations of the customer. In fact, it is the characteristics of the product that will give value to it. In this case, services are necessary elements in customer relationships (to sell the product for instance) but their role is definitely not strategic. This is why; technological aspects of the product are the central point in such an approach. These aspects must be better than those of the competition (Gronroos, 2007).

On the contrary, when talking about a service perspective, it means “service components in customer relationships are seen as strategic” (Gronroos, 2007). What is essential there is to develop a trustful and strong customer relationship. Of course, such as the product, the quality of the service itself and its characteristics are important.

However, the way the service is provided to the customer is what creates a competitive advantage (Gronroos, 2007). This way of providing the service will make the difference between each competitor on a same market. Therefore, services must propose a core solution to the customers and this solution must be provided in the way that fits customers’ expectations.

Now that the authors know the difference between both perspectives, they can easily summarize it. When developing a product, the solution itself offered to the customer is the source of competitive advantage. The service around is just seen as an additional value. On the contrary, with a service approach, the solution proposed is important but relationships developed around are the main sources of competitive advantage.
In a service perspective, customers will of course look for good solutions but they will also pay attention to how these solutions are provided (Gronroos, 2007).

3.7.3 Communication around services

As one talked about communication before, it has some specificity regarding services. In fact, in his book, C. Gronroos (2007) highlights, of course, traditional way to communicate such as advertising, sales promotion or direct marketing; nevertheless, he also develops communication aspects which are determinant when selling a service.

He describes communication as being part of the interactive marketing process (Gronroos, 2007). According to his researches, direct interaction with the customer is the first communication step when you sell services.

There is an important difference between communication of traditional marketing and the one involves in the interactive marketing process (mainly used in services). The first one, using advertising or publicity, is really abstract for the customer. “They involve promises and/or information that may or may not be true” (Gronroos, 2007). These promises must still be tested and “testing takes place when customer meets the reality” (Gronroos, 2007).

This reality is given by interactive communication and marketing process. “There is an obvious connection with how service quality is perceived” (Gronroos, 2007). “What employees say, how they say it, how they behave, how service outlets, machines and other physical resources look all communicates something to the customer”. (Gronroos, 2007)

Then, if interactions details and physical evidences are well prepared, effects on the customer will be positive. They could think and say things like “they really care for me here”, “they have modern and efficient equipment” or “employees are nicely dressed”. On the contrary, if these interactions are neglected, customers’ opinion will of course be less favourable. Then their thoughts could be “how rude these people are”, “what a sloppy office they have” or “how can it always take so long to get things done here” (Gronroos, 2007).

At the end, what does really count is the size of the gap between expectations and experiences (Gronroos, 2007). What brands and companies show to the customer in their advertising campaign must fit the reality of the service provided. If the gap between both is too important, then the customers’ expectations will not be reached by the brand.
“Almost everything the organization says about itself and its performance and almost everything the organization does, that is experienced in the service encounters has an impact on the customer (Gronroos, 2007).

This is why, companies involve in services such as fitness centre must use traditional communication but they must also think about the experience they offer to the customer (Gronroos, 2007). This experience must become their priority as it will immediately communicate something to the customer. In fact, this experience will decide on fidelity or not of the customer. If the experience proposed reach its expectations, then, he will come back, if not the game is over for the firm. This is only about one chance (Gronroos, 2007).
4/ Empirical findings

4.1 Interview
4.1.1 Sats in Halmstad

Here are the main data collected from the interview with Sats personal trainer (named Christopher). The purpose is not to describe every detail from the interview but just to give a general aspect. The authors inform the readers that the complete interview can be found at the end of the thesis.

The fitness centre is located in Halmstad, downtown for 15 years. They have about 1300 members, 30 employees and different offers adapted to the need of their customers. For instance, they propose 3 months memberships to twelve months memberships. Prices are also different depending on if you are a student, member of a sponsor company or just a “normal” customer. However, the average price is about 395kr for a month. Christopher, personal trainer there justifies high prices saying that Sats is known all over Sweden: “it is a really big group; it is one of the biggest” (Christopher, Interview, p92).

As all the big groups, Sats composed with different levels in the hierarchy. Here in Halmstad, the personal trainers are working closed to the customers with a supervisor controlling them. “Then after, a guy is in charge of all the centre in south of Sweden and that guy has a boss who communicate to all the centre in Sweden” (Christopher, Interview, p95).

About marketing and communication decisions, Christopher answers that Sats “have a lot of different strategies” (Christopher Interview, p92). He differentiates the strategy developed in small cities (such as Halmstad) with the strategy decided in Stockholm. There, he presents the notoriety as their first strength: “in Stockholm, we have 65 centres at the moment, there is one around every corner. So that in itself is a marketing strategy” (Christopher, Interview, p93). According to him, notoriety allows Sats to reduce communication cost: “every single person in Sweden knows about Sats, even if you are from far up in the North” (Christopher, Interview, p93).

Nevertheless, the strategy is a bit different in Halmstad as it is a quite small city. There, Sats rely on free week’s trials: “each time we have somebody who comes to try the workout; we always offer it for free” (Christopher, interview, p93).
According to him, a free week trial is one of the best tools as the customer needs to register before. Therefore, once registered, they have all the information needed to call him back.

Then, the authors interviewed Christopher about specific techniques that work especially with fitness centres. Here, the answer is very clear, “it is all about, looking good, feeling good, secure and so on…” (Christopher, interview, p93). According to him, looking good sales but more than it is the construction of a functional body. For him, what the gym must promote is a training that will be useful in the everyday life.

However, what is absolutely denied by Sats is that personal trainers have not to look good themselves: “Many of our best trainers do not focus on look good, they work a lot on their skills, this is more important (Christopher, interview, p93). Then, one understands that there are no restrictions on employee’s physical appearance. Nevertheless, Christopher recognized that “it helps, by marketing, it helps looking good. I think it does” (Interview p94).

In order to be more focused, the authors questioned Sats personal trainer about the most efficient communication tool for them? Here, in page 94, Christopher answered: “the absolutely greatest tool that you can get is word of mouth”. According to him, what people tell around them is the most important thing to consider. “When you have a customer, a member, who recommends you, nothing beats that, (Christopher, Interview, p94).

Trying to study the gym area in a whole, the authors also questioned Christopher about the extra goods on sell at the reception. “It helps that it is available but it is not something that we make money from”, (Christopher, Interview, p94). According to him, extra goods are an additional source of revenue, “we do not do any huge money from that, the month membership is what drawn all the money” (Christopher, Interview, p94).

Mentioning feedback (p95), Sats is working with formulas to complete: “there are six random feedback formulas being e-mailed out to a random customer, basically, six hundred each week”. Customers have the possibility to mention everything they want. It can deal with general aspect of the gym, how clean it is; skills of the staff or something they would like to change (Christopher, Interview, p95). According to him, the response rate from members is very high. Customers find it important to give their opinion in order that Sats improve its performance.
Another way to collect the feedback is describing by Christopher (p95) as face to face: “the big part is also that we have a reception that everyone goes through.” According to him, the best way to get a constructive feedback is to talk with the customer almost every day.

Questions as “how do you feel today” or “how was your workout” can be the way to know customer’s opinion about the gym. “We get to look them in the eyes and ask to have their feedback”, (Christopher, Interview, p95).

When comes the time to fix the problems described by the customers, Sats differentiates two types of demand. The first ones are “that kind of feedback we just have to ignore because you cannot do anything with it” (Christopher, p96). Then, the second ones are concrete information that Sats can fix rapidly: “the shower is dirty, ok then we clean the shower, and there is no problem with that” (Christopher, p96). Therefore, Sats personal trainers draw the attention on the fact that feedback is useful as far as it can be solved.

In a last subsection, the authors questioned Sats about the visual in fitness centre. How important is it to place the machines in the right way and develop a pleasant design. According to Christopher (p96), it is one of the most important details a gym centre must think about: “there is a thought behind it” (Christopher; p96). According to him, the big priority must be making everything easy for the customer. For instance, in the next question (p96), Christopher declared: “everyone that gets a membership with us, get two meetings with a personal trainer for free”. The goal is to give them “a foundation”, something to start with, to “get close to the results that they want” (Christopher, p97).

Concerning how it looks in the gym, meaning the design, Christopher told about the easiest question since the beginning. According to him, colours and details are not so important but the whole design must be nice. This is one of the conditions to convince people to stay in; “they pay and give money because it looks good” (Christopher, p97).

4.1.2 Actic in Halmstad

The following paragraphs aim at summarizing the main facts discussed during the interview with Actic. Once again not every detail will be presented, and the complete transcript of the interview is available in the appendix, page 90. The Actic employee interviewed is a personal trainer working in the Halmstad Arena facility.
Actic is an international fitness company with facilities in Sweden, Norway and Finland. It regroups more than 80 centres all around Sweden only. The company counts three facilities only in Halmstad. The one interviewed is located in the Halmstad Arena. The centre was built five years ago at the same time the Arena was. Hence the facility looks modern and new. Moreover the centre regroups 2000 customers, it represents an important facility comparing to the city size. “We have around 2000 customers and the daily number is far less obviously” (David interview p.90).

When introducing his facility, David first mentioned prices applied by Actic. The subscription fee is 550kr to which customers must add a monthly payment. If the subscription fee is the same for everybody, the monthly payment regroups several prices and formulas. For a student prices may vary between 309 and 539kr per month depending on the contract length (4 or 12 months), it can even grow to 749kr per month with the Max-kortet offer (possibility to train in any Actic centre). A regular person would have to pay between 359 and 629kr depending on the time perspective once again. Hence the centre is proposing a large panel of prices and offers depending on the profile, the objective and the customers’ location.

The company organization is made through different decision levels. The facility is composed of one manager who has one local boss ahead of him managing the whole Halland region. Then global or strategical decisions are taken at the national headquarters in Stockholm and then transmitted to regional and local managers.

This management system is similar to the one applied for communication. The local manager is responsible for local communication. Targeting proper schools and companies for partnerships are decisions made locally since it requires direct, personal contacts. But global communication strategies are under the responsibility of Stockholm. David explains this functioning this way: “If we, in this facility alone would like to go out to a school, we can make the decision ourselves (…) but when it is bigger thinks, centrally, they do it from Stockholm” (David Interview, p90).

The authors have just mentioned the relations Actic is developing with local entities such as schools or companies. But the company also works on keeping close relations with each customer. The role of social media and internet has never been so important. To the question “how would you describe the communication strategy adopted by Actic”, David first words were: “I think it is mainly through social media, like Facebook”.

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Social networks tend to touch a lot of people, but his answer was moderated by the other side of communication: direct meetings. Employees often go in companies and schools to get partnership or simply promote Actic. According to him the ratio of deciding on a membership among those touched by the message is far better when directly talking to people compare to indirect means like emailing.

The notion of direct interactions is particularly important for Actic who decided to focus on personal training in order to increase its revenues. Note that, the facility does not have any class. It reduces the number of employees needed (1 full time, 2 part time and 4 people at specific hours for the entire facility), but instead the company focus on proposing personal training. The actual main revenue source is fee payment. In order to increase this fee, Actic decided to increase the service offering, “they are trying to instead of changing what we give to customer, they are changing the way customer pays” (David, Interview, p90). By prioritising personal training, the company hopes to increase the average fee payment of each member.

Moreover convincing members to get a personal trainer increase the income the company gets each month without raising size issues for the facility. David proved this new strategy when mentioning this offer: “you can get an hour with an instructor but not a personal trainer for free without singing up” (David Interview, p90).

One final subject mentioned during this interview is the colour importance and disposition. David explained that Actic main colours are white and blue, two soft colours the customers may find everywhere from the lockers to the workout areas. Moreover, the personal trainer explained the disposition of machines is different depending on categories. The company organised the area this way: cardio and free weight are two areas which are not ruled by a precise order the customers should follow.

Instead it is organised for the customers to have mirrors accessible for free weight and visibility for cardio exercise (meaning bikes cannot be behind treadmill for obvious reasons). On the other hand, machines are disposed in a precise way customers should follow, to make a proper workout: “a route that is easy for the client to walk, it is like a logical order, a good way to train, going from this machine to this machine or this machine” (David Interview, p90).
4.2 Survey

The questionnaire was available online during two weeks; the authors published it on the internet on the 1st of May and obtained 216 answers (on the 13th of May). The initial goal was to reach 200 answers; therefore 216 answers are more than enough to build a constructive analysis.

On 216 persons answering the questionnaire, 115 (53.2%) are men and 101 (46.8%) are women. Division between men and women will permit us to study if communication driven by fitness centre has the same impact on both.

**Respondent age**

The questionnaire has been shared around the internet plus at the exit of one fitness centre during almost 2 weeks. 216 respondents gently took time to answer the survey. During the first part they had to provide their age. The youngest person is 16 years old, while the oldest is 87. The quartile shows that 50% of the panel is between 20 and 28 years old. Note the median, which is not represented on the previous graphic, is 21 years old. The average age of people being member of a fitness centre is 24.83 years old while the average age of people not having any membership in a fitness centre is 25.58 years old.

Among all (men and women together), 83 of them (38.4%) declared being a member of fitness centre and 133 of them (61.6%) declared not being a member of fitness centre.
This mean that the big majority (around two third) of the persons answering the questionnaire are not attending a gym. However, this does not constitute a problem as the authors choose to target both. In fact, this repartition will permit us to study how non-members perceive the communication from fitness centre.

**Nationality**

The last question of this first part concerns the nationality of each respondent. On the following map one can see in orange the 18 different nationalities which have responded to the authors’ survey. The majority of the respondents are from western and northern Europe. Moreover no one from Asia or Oceania responded to the questionnaire. South America is represented only by Brazil while both United States and Canada are mentioned. Finally some people from Africa have responded (Morocco and Gabon).
4.2.1 Empirical data: Members of fitness centre

**Which fitness centre are you going in? (Name and city)**

This question is the first question only addressed to members of a fitness centre. It deals with their location and the centre they are attending. It cumulates 44 different fitness centre out of 83 respondents to the question. They are spread in 12 countries, in Europe mainly and particularly in France.

The most represented centre are the University Idrottcentrum (19 members) and Sats (10 members) in Halmstad as well as Genae Bron (6 members).

**How did you get in touch with the fitness centre you are going in?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth / Bouche à oreille</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising / Publicité</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free trials / Essais gratuits</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email &amp; phone calls / Email &amp; appels téléphoniques</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networks / Réseaux sociaux</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autre</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25.6 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As supposed before, the top answer there is “word of mouth”. In fact, 42 persons (more than 50% of the total) mentioned it to explain how they “discover” the gym. 27 persons (32.5%) referred to “others”. When developing their answer, the big majority of them mentions “notoriety”, “location” or “researches on the net”. In third position, respondents answered “free trials” 16 times (19.3%).
Then come “advertising” with 13 answers (15.7%), “social networks” with 5 answers (6%) and “E-mail and phone call” at last with only 3 answers (3.6%).

“How important were the following aspects when deciding on the membership”? 

Free trials / Essais gratuits [How important were the following aspects when deciding on the membership? (1 being insignificant and 6 extremely important)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free trials</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attractive prices / Prix attractifs [How important were the following aspects when deciding on the membership? (1 being insignificant and 6 extremely important)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractive prices</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promotional offers / Offres promotionnelles [How important were the following aspects when deciding on the membership? (1 being insignificant and 6 extremely important)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotional offers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Functionality / Salle fonctionnelle [How important were the following aspects when deciding on the membership? (1 being insignificant and 6 extremely important)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functionality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On this question, people answering had to decide on a grade from 1 to 5 on each proposition (1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important). These propositions were “free trials”, “promotional offers”, “functionality”, “notoriety” and “personal reasons”.

What appears as the most significant for them are “attractive prices” as 42 people (more than the half) chose a 5 in this field. “Functionality” is also very significant since 34 people (41%) gave a 4 and 35 people (42, 2%) gave a 5. Just after, one may find “personal reasons” with 26 people (31, 3%) grading a 4 and 22 persons (26, 5%) grading a 5.

Just under, “notoriety” is hard to interpret, indeed, 21 people (25, 3%) graded a 1 but 25 people (30, 1%) graded a 3 on this field. At last, “promotional offers” and “free trials” are quite insignificant. In fact, 20 people (24, 1%) gave a 1 for “promotional offers” and 27 people (32, 5%) did the same for “free trials”.

**How frequently are you going to the gym? (Sessions per week)**
This question asks members of fitness centre at which frequency they are practicing. They had 7 choices from “0” to “6 and more” with the possibility to pick only one. In the end, this question showed that more than half (41 people) of the respondents are going 2 to 3 times in their fitness centre per week (in average). The second most important category is [4; 6 and more] with 33% of the sample. Note that 25 people are going twice a week to their fitness centre, upgrading this answer to the most common in the sample. 1 person has also a membership in a centre without using it, thus responding 0 to this question.

**How long in average is your training session? (In minutes)**

![Average workout length chart]

This second “profile” question covers the same topic as the previous but focusing this time on the average length of a typical session. First among the 83 answers the average length is about 84 minutes. The most common answer being around 90 minutes with 30 people practicing that long. Hence the [90:120[, category is the most represented with 40.96% of the sample. The second one is [60:90[, with 28 answers representing 33.73% of the population.
Answers at this question are mainly divided. People answering have to choose on a scale between 1 which means “not at all” and 5 meaning “extremely interested”. As a result, 19 people (22, 9%) answered 1, exactly the same proportion answered 2, 18 people (21, 7%) answered 3 and 17 people (20, 5%) answered 4. Finally, only 10 people (12%) put a 5 on this question.

Loyalty of customers seems to be explained by two major criteria. The first one is “modern facilities” as 57 people (68, 7%) mentioned this answer. The second one concerns attractive prices with 41 people (49, 4%). “Community” and “skilled employees” seem to be significant too but not as much as the two first ones. In fact, respectively 29 and 28 people (34, 9% and 33, 7%) elected this answer. Finally “promotional offers” are describing by answerers as insignificant with only 3 people electing it (3, 6%).

### Does your fitness centre sell extra goods? (Clothes, food, drinks...)

- **Yes / Oui**: 67 (80.7%)
- **No / Non**: 16 (19.3%)
Easy repartition of the answers as it is a yes/no question. 67 people (80, 7%) answered “yes” and 16 (19, 3%) answered “no”.

What is the main marketing tool used to promote them?

Direct marketing / Marketing direct [What is the main marketing tool used to promote them? (1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important)]

Banners / Affichage [What is the main marketing tool used to promote them? (1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important)]

Sales promotions / Offres promotionnelles [What is the main marketing tool used to promote them? (1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important)]

Face to face / Personnel de vente [What is the main marketing tool used to promote them? (1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important)]
Answers are more than disparate to this question. Answerers do not seem to have a clear idea of it. For instance, concerning “banners”, 23 people (27, 7%) graded a 4, 15 people (18, 1%) graded a 5 but 21 people (25, 3%) graded a 1. This is the same observation with “sales promotion” where 23 people answered 4 and 21 persons answered 1.

On the contrary, other propositions look insignificant for the answerers. In fact, 25 people (30, 1%) graded a 1 in “direct marketing”, 35 people (42, 2%) did the same for “face to face” and 47 people (56, 6%) for “others”.

Did you ever buy some of these extra goods?

Easy repartition of the answers as it is a yes/no question. 24 people (30%) answered “yes” to the question and 56 (70%) answered “no”.

Does your fitness centre propose promotional offers if you attract new members? (friends, family...)

Easy repartition of the answers as it is a yes/no question. 32 people (40%) answered “yes” and 48 (60%) answered “no”.

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Easy repartition of the answers as it is a yes/no question. 32 people (40%) answered “yes” to the question and 48 (60%) answered “no”.

**Are you providing feedback to your fitness centre?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes / Oui</th>
<th>No / Non</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Easy repartition of the answers as it is a yes/no question. 24 people (28, 9%) answered “yes” and 59 (71, 1%) answered “no”.

**How (Feedback)**

Here, respondents faced an open question, this is why; many answers had been collected. However, majority of the answerers mentioned the same thing that is to say “face to face” talks, “e-mail” or “phone calls”. Many persons declared that when a problem occurred, they fix it directly with their “personal trainer or the direction of the gym”. Other answerers mention surveys or social networks but the most efficient way for them remains “direct talks”.

**To conclude, are you thinking that communication has an impact on your decisions regarding fitness centre? (Please develop your answer, and provide examples if possible).**

Here is an open question; answers are divided between yes, no or both. The big majority of the answerers declare that communication has an impact on attracting people; “Yes communication plays a big role in the fitness industry”.

They are numerous to mention that “banners, free trials or promotional offers” pushed them to try and then take the membership. For them, communication is part of the success of fitness centre as it is “the first way to attract customers”; “Communication helps people on deciding which centre to go to, help people being more enthusiastic when training”.

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Another (small) part of the answerers mentioned communication as important not to attract members but to make them want to stay in. They declare “I believe that it plays a more important role in customer retention rather than attracting new customers”.

For these answerers the most important is the design, the service and special offers for members; “I think that the services quality will make the final call on whether I should carry on with this centre or not.”

Finally, some people refused to associate communication with attraction of new members. Many of them mention schedules, prices and the gym itself to be the most important factors; “No, for me it's all about location, prices and functionality”; “I would never want a gym that closed at 21.00 for example”. Other ones declared that they are “just keen on sport, they need it” and they will select the gym with the best equipment. At last, some answerers highlight friends and community to be their first source of motivation; “I am not focus on communication but more on friends advices and word of mouth”.

4.2.2 Empirical data: Non-members of fitness centre

This question is the first people not going to any fitness centre faced. It revealed three main tendencies. The first cumulates more than half of the answers provided with 74 people who think that fitness centre is at least too expensive. This figure represents 55.6% of overall answers provided. Then 54 people (or 40.6% of the answers) do not go to fitness centre because they do not like it. This tendency is often linked with the answer “Too expensive” and “Not enough time”. This third criteria represents the last tendency dominating this question with 43 people including it in their answers. It represents around 30% of the answers, which is the double compared to the answer “Other” with 15.8% for this last possibility.
On this graph, one can see that among the 133 people who answered they are not going to any fitness centre, 124 (93.2% of the sample) already heard about their offers. On the other hand only 6.8% of the sample, or 9 people, never get in touch with any fitness centre.

For this third question, respondent were asked to select one or several factors through which they get information from fitness centre. Hence two main tools were mentioned. First “Friends” which has been mentioned 97 times representing 77.6% of the panel answering this particular question. Then is “Billboards” with 65% of the panel and 82 people who mentioned this factor. On the other hand “Email and phone calls” as well as “Telemarketing” cumulate low scores with 5 people (or 4% of the sample) mentioning those factors in their answers.
How likely is it that the following aspects would change your view on fitness centre (1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important)?

This question does not raise a particular tendency since most factors have scattered answers. Nonetheless, one can observe an importance of the factor “Friends” with 55.6% (74 answers) of respondents assessing the factor at a level of 3 or 4.

Following this tendency “Personal following” cumulate high scores with around 40% (54 people) assessing the factor as extremely important or important (4 or 5). On the contrary, it appears that “Group sessions” cumulates low scores since 41 people (30% of the panel) consider it as an insignificant factor. The two last factors “Free trials” and “Important promotions” have highly scattered answers that do not permit to conclude on any major tendency.

To conclude, are you thinking that communication has an impact on your decisions regarding fitness centre? (Please develop your answer, and provide examples if possible).

This question being opened, the answers can be really different. From a simple yes or no, up to longer explanations of their opinion. On a general standpoint, people do not really feel any effect over the communication generated by fitness centre. It seems that personal feelings are more important. People express the need for personal reasons to go and train in a particular centre (friends coming with them, group sessions, personal trainer…). A lack of precision in the offers is often pointed out. Several answers also mention the possibility to change their mind if exceptional prices or major training innovations were displayed. Following the idea of exceptional prices, it is frequently mentioned that prices, beside exceptional time limited offers, are too high.

A final tendency could be designated as non-potential consumers. They express an aversion for inside sports and prefer natural environments. They do not like the mood or simply do not like sport. These people thus do not think at all that communication techniques or any exterior factors could change their mind about fitness centre.
5/ Analysis

This part aims at analysing the empirical data collected from the questionnaire. Description has been done previously and the empirical data will only be used to support the analysis. The purpose is to start answering to the research question by comparing empirical data with theoretical researches and hypothesis done previously. Thanks to this comparison, one will have a first idea of the real impact of communication strategies towards customers.

5.1 Communication process and customer selection

A company seeking to make profits must know and understand their customers (Kotler, 2007). In order to do so firms must go through several steps, from dividing the market to the selection of customers, and the selection of a proper position for their products.

5.1.1 Step one: Segmentation

The very first step is defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2010) as the process of dividing a market in specific groups of customers sharing common needs and who might require separate products as well as marketing mixes. Dibb (2006) introduces the notion of separating a heterogeneous market in homogeneous segments.

The interview with a staff member of Actic shows that fitness centre adopt different prices according to members’ age and commitment. Indeed a regular Actic member would pay for a 4 months formula 629 kr per month, while it would cost 359 kr with a 12 months formula. If this customer were a student, prices would be 539 kr per month for 4 months and 309 kr each month for 12 months. Finally Actic launched the “Max-kortet” which raises prices from 120 to 300 kr depending on the length, and allows members to go in any Actic facility in Sweden.

Fitness centre such as Sats or Actic, provide different prices for different people. Their offer is segmented according to people’s age but also according to their time perspective. It means fitness centre assess the will of their customers in order to propose prices that fit their requirements. People taking a membership have different reasons for doing so. The questionnaire revealed that “personal reasons” is the second most important factor when deciding on a membership while prices are the first. Such figure means centre have to create a segmentation of their prices that fits what customers aim (leisure activity, bodybuilding, performance enhancement…).
The segmentation process is done through the use of one or more variables that can be demographic, behavioural, and geographic and many others (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010).

It is said that there is no single best way to segment a market and almost every indicator can be used in order to do so. Through the study of their questionnaires the authors noticed an important dominance of the location factor. It represents 11 answers, and 13.25% of the 83 respondents to this question. It is higher than email and social networks answers combined. Moreover when comparing both maps for respondents nationality and their training places, one can draw a similar pattern. Both maps are concentrated over the western and northern Europe, including a low presence in Latin America.

Such factor shows that fitness centre fame, and its coverage over the local or national territory is determinant for their success. During the interview at Sats, the manager mentioned the high number of centre they implemented in Stockholm. During face to face questionnaires, these figures came out a lot. Fitness centre have a great interest in controlling the local market and communicating a lot at this scale.

The theoretical part concerning segmentation previously drew the conclusion that this element of the marketing mix helps companies to differentiate itself. Indeed the segmentation can be considered as an introducing phase for the positioning decisions. The segmentation helps companies creating a unique, developed, distinct position for each segment identified. This tendency revealed during the questionnaire that 26.51% of respondents are member of a thematic sport club. It means 22 members are working out in a fitness centre integrated in another structure, the most represented being centre within universities.

The choice to integrate a bigger structure such as a university or a company results from segmentation assessment and choice. Indeed choosing a university or a company to implement a facility means the centre has segmented the market and find out potential customers were grouped and unsatisfied around these locations. This factor could be linked with the following part which concerns targeting.

5.1.2 Targeting phase

Kotler and Armstrong (2010) define targeting as “the process of evaluating each market’s segment attractiveness and selecting one or more segment to enter”. They introduce four
different scales of targeting. Undifferentiated, which means going after all customers, considering there is no difference between each other.

Segment marketing where companies select several segments to enter and adapt their offer in consequence. Concentrated marketing focuses over special niches, designing very special offers. Finally, the most concentrated form of targeting strategy which is the micromarketing, going after carefully chosen individuals or groups. During the empirical findings processes, the authors have noticed the will centre have to target young people in priority.

One already introduced the data concerning age. However, in order to support their analysis, the authors remind the reader that the median is 21, meaning that 50% of people answering the questionnaire were under this age (so between 21 and 16); the other 50% being older (up to 87).

This leads to one conclusion, the image of fitness centre is young. Most people frequenting fitness centre are seen as young people, working out to increase their performances. The different advertising they adopt inside and outside the facility also stage young people. 75% of respondents are under 28. The target for fitness centre is definitely young people under 30 years. People who do not necessarily have family constraints and who tend to be close to friends (50% of members got in touch with their fitness centre by word of mouth).

Kotler and Armstrong (2010) not only talk about the company and its customers when defining targeting process, but also introduce competitors’ influence. Indeed when processing a targeting strategy, any company should have a look at how competitors do and how it could be done differently. Among the two fitness centre the authors interviewed, the training offers were completely different. Actic is offering free personal training with an instructor for any new membership. It proposes also some training sessions with a personal coach. Then Sats on the other hand proposes two free sessions with a personal trainer for any new membership, as well as one free trial, and possibilities for group and personal class with a coach. It also requires to every staff member three years of experience to enter the company.

Most fitness centre adopts similar characteristics which create a pattern. Offers for new members, personal trainings or even extra goods are common services offered by centre. But each fitness club tries to differentiate the offer compare to direct competitors. For example Sats propose a kindergarten for their members in order to enable young families to train
without nanny issues or time constraints linked to children. The authors when questioning members directly notices the effect of such additional bonus. Lots of young parents were members as well as few questioned customers characterised this detail as really decisive in their choice.

This kind of extra is part of Sats fame, which counts more than half a million members despite having expensive membership fees. Hence one can see here that doing things differently, adding extra services needed by potential members could enhance targeting effects.

Kotler (2011) mentioned that a correct targeting strategy allows companies to use specific communication strategies. In the end it helps to use the right communication channel to reach the proper customer, thus attracting customers more efficiently. Such process is used through face to face communication when it comes to fitness centre. Some partnerships with companies or sport club are the result of a carefully chosen targeting strategy. Doing so helps fitness centre getting personal more rapidly with potential customers.

During the interview with Actic, their employee told the authors, it happens that few employees directly go to a targeted school or company to present the fitness club and discuss a potential agreement. He also confessed that such strategy tends to bring back clients more efficiently. The number of people getting a membership is close to the number of people concerned by such action. Then this confirmed the conclusions drawn by Alme Maria (2013) in the frame of references: “fitness centre are more likely to use personal and face to face communication strategies” This strategy is used in completion to normal mass media communication fitness centre is used to adopt.

Until this point, one basically talked only about segmented marketing strategy. Even though it represents the main part of the targeting strategy, some concentrated and personal targeting is still used. The main one is the micromarketing or personal marketing strategy. The purpose is to design a specific product and strategy for each individual or group of individuals. This kind of strategy could be seen when a personal training process is designed with a customer.

During the questionnaire the authors saw an important dispersion about customers’ advices regarding personal training with only 12% considering personal training as really important. Another personal contact firms have with their customers is feedback this time. Svane (2014) explains that 70% of complaining customers would remain loyal if the problem is solved.
28.4% of customers questioned provide feedback to their centre. Despite attempts to get personal with their customers, fitness centre still have troubles to invert the communication sense and apply a micromarketing strategy efficiently in addition to personal training.

A final comment that should be made is despite those general tendencies fitness centre do not apply a strict targeting. Anyone can join a fitness centre no matter their age or their income. Indeed the questionnaire showed that the difference between the youngest and oldest member is 40 years old. Also the questionnaire revealed a new tendency. Two respondents confessed being members in free fitness centre handled by their town council. Then, it means that Fitness centre do not develop STP as it is described by Kotler and Barringer in theoretical chapter. Their priority is much more to develop an attractive image focusing on undifferentiated targeting (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010).

In conclusion, the authors could say that fitness centre apply a targeting strategy mainly toward young people in terms of special offer and visual communication. However, it remains open and interested in using mass communication.

5.1.3 Positioning analysis

Positioning is the act of “arranging a product to occupy a clear, distinctive and desirable place relating to competing products in the minds of target customers” (Kotler, Armstrong, 2010, p74).

Positioning is about shaping a precise image of the company in customers mind. It is generally stable and really hard for customers to change their mind once they made their opinion (Kotler, 2011). A good positioning requires the company to deliver a consistent message (Provost, 2006). From logo to slogan, every detail shapes customers’ mind even though it is unconscious. Hence positioning is not only concerning what the company does with its product or service but rather what it offers to customers’ mind (Provost, 2006).

A first example of positioning the authors witnessed is the differentiation over prices. Indeed Sats is known to be a more expensive fitness centre compared to Actic. Moreover six answers out of the ten, the authors got from Sats, selected “skilled employees” as a determinant factor for their membership. One can see here a will to place Sats as a high quality fitness centre. The differentiation is done through the promotion of employees’ experience (3 years minimum), justifying the high prices applied.
This can be linked to Gronroos (2007) characteristics of the service: “what employees say, how they say it, how they behave, how they look, all communicates something to the customer”.

This coherence results in an effective communication since many times Sats members mentioned the high coverage of the brand in Stockholm. In the end, the average importance of notoriety in deciding whether or not taking a membership is 2.66 for Sats members while the overall average is 2.47 on a ladder of 5.

Kotler (2011) mentions that positioning encloses not only the basic product provided but also every side features, or additional services proposed by the company. Each of them must answer a want from customers. Nonetheless they are not basic as far as they are not the first reason customers are coming for. It draws a general picture of the company’s proposal. Skilled employees for example are involved in 33.7% of the sample’s answers when asking why they are loyal to their fitness centre.

This figure shows that despite people are not directly interacting with employees for their working out; they still consider employees’ qualification as important (as mentioned by Gronroos, 2007)

Finally, the theoretical part mentioned the importance of each interaction. Here the company not only needs to know its audience but it also needs to give proofs to customers. This is what Kotler (2007) characterises as “look and feel”. It means the company should show the customers that their communication is consistent and relevant according to their expectations.

For example any employee should wear sports clothes black or blue. The machines are also organised as a path customers may follow in order to have a proper work out. Then comes a factor which is deeply unconscious but of main importance in communication: the colours. Actic has blue as brand’s official colour. Blue is well known to be colour referring to peace, calm seriousness and cool (Gage, 1999). Lockers, the sport hall, the reception and logos everything is done to call back these emotions.

Communication is not necessarily conscious. Here the authors point out the importance that a good positioning has over customers. Following the definition Kotler and Armstrong (2010) provide, one could see how such unconscious factors get their importance. These details have
influence over customers’ choices even though they may not consciously consider the importance of locker’s walls colour.

5.2 Communication mix

In the theoretical chapter, the authors mentioned the communication mix as being an essential part of the process in attracting customers. To remind the audience, communication mix is “the particular combination of marketing tools that work together to communicate the marketer’s message, to achieve the marketer’s objectives, and to satisfy the target market” (Kotler, 2007).

Now that all the answers from the questionnaire had been collected, the authors will be able to discuss which tools work the best towards customers. The first communication tool mentioned in the theoretical part is advertising as a public mode of communication transmitted simultaneously to large number of people (Kotler, 2009).

5.2.1 Advertising

If one now focus on the answers collected, it is quite obvious that advertising does not fit well with the expectations of fitness centre members. When analyzing the answers, one clearly sees that answerers prefer more private communication. In fact, the majority of them mention other reasons to explain what “pushed them to take the membership”.

For instance, to the question “How did you get in touch with the fitness centre you are going in”; only 13 people answered advertising and nobody told about “mass advertising”. Furthermore, interviews the authors did with supervisors revealed that fitness centre do not use this kind of tool as they develop more local publicity (as mentioned by Alme Maria, 2013).

Consequently, according to the empirical data, mass media is not a pertinent tool to attract potential members. Fitness centre seem to be aware of it as they avoid developing mass communication. As regards customers, answers clearly show that they need to feel particular, they need a private relation with their gym and mass media do not allow it.
5.2.2 Sales promotion

Another tool is sales promotions which refer to “distinct invitation to the consumer to do the transaction in a short period of time” (Kotler, 2009). For fitness centre, sales promotion can refer to promotional offers or free trials.

Mainly, answers here are divided but a big majority of persons mentioned it as really important for them. For instance, marketing strategies involving free trials or promotional offers are frequently quoted by the answerers of the questionnaire.

When answering opened questions, the majority of them declared that “they need and want experience before taking the membership”. This had been stated by Armstrong et Al (2008) in the theoretical chapter: “sales promotions are short-term incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service”. It seems significant for the customer to be able to try and test the gym before taking a decision. This is undoubtedly why more and more fitness centre develops free week trials. In fact, among the two fitness centre studied, each of them is proposing free sessions before deciding on a membership.

5.2.3 Public relations and publicity

Then fitness centre develops public relations “an organization systematic plans and efforts to control and manage its image” and publicity “type of promotion that relies on public relation effects of a new story” (University of WISCONSIN, River Falls). According to the answers collected, the image of fitness centre appears as very important for its members.

While some of them only mention personal reasons to justify why they take the membership, others highlight notoriety and functionality of the gym. According to a majority of customers, what people are saying about a fitness centre will determine whether they go or not to this fitness centre. In fact, more than 50% of the sample elected “word of mouth” when justifying why they take the membership. Therefore, controlling and managing its image (public relations) appears as crucial for fitness centre.

If one now focus on publicity, around 16% of the sample declared that they get in touch with fitness centre thanks to it (as they mention broadly advertising). Most of the time, answerers declared that publicity they face concerns special prices or promotional offers. This is easily understandable when one know that big majority of the sample chose their fitness centre regarding the prices proposed.
Publicity “is a cheap way for them to target local customers who cannot avoid seeing it” (Alme Maria, 2013). On the opened question, many customers confirmed the efficiency of publicity. They declared that a nice publicity focusing on interesting prices and modern facilities can easily seduce them. Here are two pertinent answers collected as regards publicity: “if there happens to be something exceptional (promos, new training methods) I could probably go for it”; “For instance, I think that a really nice banner can give to someone the will to attend a fitness centre”.

Publicity is also used by fitness centre to promote their extra goods. Among all the answers, 67 people (More than 80% of the sample) declared that their fitness centre is selling extra goods. A majority of these people noticed it thanks to publicity (banners, flyers or derivate products as mentioned in the theoretical chapter). Therefore, publicity can mostly be considered as a significant tool for fitness centre as the majority of the answerers are sensitive to it. However, to be successful, this publicity must be focused on pertinent details such as prices, promotions or new equipments.

5.2.4 Direct Marketing

Then, fitness centre can use direct marketing define by Kotler as “a communication tool that permit to convey a message directly to the customer” (2009). Mainly, direct marketing gathers few processes such as e-mail, mail, phone calls or even text message. If one now evaluates the impact of such a tool on the customers, it seems to be insignificant. In fact, very few people declared being in touch with fitness centre services thanks to direct marketing.

However, direct marketing appears to be significant when considering feedback from customers to fitness centre. In fact, majority of the members who declared providing feedback are doing it by e-mail. Therefore, in this way, direct marketing is very useful for fitness centre as one know that feedback collection determines the communication plan and strategy (Armstrong et Al, 2008).

5.2.5 Personal Selling

Another tool described by Kotler is personal selling as a “live, immediate and interactive relationship between people” (2009). Nowadays, fitness centre tries to develop personal training and personal coaching. It is the first way for them to create a personal relationship between members of the staff and customers.
For instance, when interviewing Sats, supervisors told us that they offer to their customer free session with personal trainers to start their membership. These sessions are the first step for them to convince the customer by communicating well in face to face.

However, when the authors ask members of a gym their opinion on personal training, the answerers show small interest in it. In fact 38 people (around 46% of the sample) chose 1 or 2 when answering the question “how much are you interesting in personal training”? Therefore, personal training does not appear as a good tool to keep seducing members as they prefer to train by their own.

Nevertheless, it can be a good communication strategy in order to attract new potential members. In fact, a majority of non members declared being interested in personal training. The study showed that they would eventually join a gym if they benefit from personal following and personal assistance. This means that fitness centre should develop private and adapted session to attract new customers.

5.2.6 Event and experience

Last tool concerns “event and experience” described by Kotler as “entertainment and events as well as activities that create novel interactions of consumers with product or brand” (2009). The authors did not mention questions regarding special events but many answerers highlight the fact that they aim at “living an experience with their fitness centre”. More than living an experience, the answers show that customers want to be part of a community. This appears as the top answer from members and non-members of fitness centre.

In fact, among the members, 42 of them (more than the half) mentioned word of mouth to explain how they got in touch with fitness centre. Still among members, 29 of them explain their loyalty to their fitness centre in reason of the community there. As regards non-members, 93% have already heard about fitness centre before. Among this 93%, around 78% have heard about it thanks to their friends. Still with non-members, a majority of them declared strongly that Friends could make them change their mind regarding fitness centre.

Finally, if one analyze the answers given to the last question, “are you thinking that communication has an impact on your decisions regarding fitness centre”; many are the ones who declared that classic communication has a small impact on them. On the opposite, they
described friends and family members to be very persuasive. According to these answers one may think that events, community and experience around fitness centre are one of the things which work the most to attract new members. This, once again, confirms what had been stated in the theoretical chapter. In fact, according to Kotler (2009), events are there to seduce new potential customers who may hesitate to join the experience.

5.3 Service

In the theoretical chapter, the authors mentioned the different characteristics of a service and how is it different to sell and promote it rather than a product. Exploiting Gronroos researches (2007), the authors found that “the way service is provided to the customer is what creates a competitive advantage” (Gronroos, 2007). This way of providing the service will make the difference between each competitor on a same market. Therefore, services must propose a core solution to the customers and this solution must be provided in the way that fits customers’ expectations (Gronroos, 2007).

As expected, the empirical data collected confirmed that the service provided influences mainly the decision of customers. Before deciding on a membership, customers will check the functionality of the gym including machines and employee’s skills (Gronroos, 2007).

Answers show that between two different fitness centres, the most functional will be the one where employees are doing their best to make it easy for the customer. Then, it is no surprise that members of a gym are really sensitive to the quality of the service. Most of the time, they can easily evaluate this quality when they experience free week trials or special events.

Performance of the service is also evaluated by members when answering the question “For what reasons are you loyal to your fitness centre”? In fact, if one considers that the quality of the equipment is part of the service, a majority of people mention it as a reason of their loyalty. To the same question, people explained that skilled employees are what reinforce their loyalty. Then, it is easy for the authors to conclude that high valued services are what attract customers and what make them want to stay in.

Fitness centre perfectly know it as they develop service more than anything else. In fact, when answerers mentioned the implication of employees with extra goods, they described it as insignificant. Then, it is obvious that employees prefer focusing on helping the customer and providing him/her the best conditions to train. This is easily understandable as Gronroos
(2007) stated that “the way the service is provided to the customer is what creates a competitive advantage”.

In the opened question, many people confirmed that a gym without a good service will not fit their expectations. Of course majority of them aims at training by their own as they refuse personal training but they all expect employees to be nice and professional. This confirms Gronroos (2007) theories as he presented the quality of the service as the first step in the creation of a competitive advantage. What really matter in a fitness centre activity is how they deal with their customers’ expectations. They must be the one and only priority.

However, even if they describe the quality of the service as an essential part in their decision, they are very few to give feedback to their fitness centre. In fact, only 24 people (around one quarter of the sample) declared providing feedback to their gym. The ones who do, are doing it by face to face, e-mails or feedback boxes.

As regards non-members, many declared that “top quality services” could be an argument to change their mind regarding fitness centre. For instance, people would sign for a membership if they benefit from personal assistance (around 70% of the sample). Therefore, many are the ones who need an external motivation in order to attend a gym. For them, skilled employees who may help them training every day could be this motivation.

Consequently, the authors can easily conclude that good and performing service can be the key to seduce both members and non-members of a gym (as stated by Gronroos, 2007). Nevertheless, both will not have the same expectations towards the service. Members will expect employees to provide the best conditions for training (functionality, updated machines, space) whereas non-members will ask for assistance, personal following and motivation from the staff. This is why; fitness centre must develop interactive communication and marketing with their customers (Gronroos, 2007).

5.4 Customer Relationship management

During the following part, the authors decided not to treat the Gartner model since Customer acquisition; retention and extension have been already treated in the previous part. Instead the authors decided to focus on the community aware strategy. The purpose of customer relationship management is the construction of a profitable lasting relationship with companies’ customers.

Thus one option companies have is to create a community aware strategy. It means enhancing
customers’ loyalty by creating a community spirit based around the companies’ products or services (Svane, 2014). It enhances their loyalty since the company get personal relationships with their customers treating each as unique. Moreover people are more willing to be loyal to community rather than corporations.

The empirical data the authors collected all along this thesis showed how far community aware strategy could increase customers’ loyalty; bringing back new adherents in the end. In fact, the study shows that customers feeling part of a community are practising more than the others. They also give more feedback as they feel involved in the development of a functional fitness centre.

However, the study also shows that these people are buying less extra goods than the ones who don’t care about the creation of a community. The conclusion one can draw from these statements is that the creation of a community among fitness centre have mixed results. Indeed, customers considering community as important tend to stay more time for their working out. But what is more important is the data concerning feedback.

Indeed people considering community as an important factor of their loyalty, tend to give more feedbacks. It seems very important that customers and companies communicate in both ways since 70% of customers complaining would remain loyal if their problem is solved. Moreover, active customers would be willing to become volunteer sales forces by communicating with relatives about their centre. The survey revealed that half of the customers got in touch with their centre by word of mouth. Hence this tendency to communicate more about their centre from customers involved in the community remains crucial for the company.

But other data counter balanced those results. Indeed the expenses customers with community sense are not necessarily higher since 33% of them bought extra goods against 30% for the overall. The customer extension cannot be based only on community strategy. It shows also that the level of communication between customers and companies are not high enough to influence them to buy significantly more extra goods. In the end one can say that community aware strategy influences customers to talk more about their fitness centre, potentially leading to more incoming members.
6/ Conclusion

This study aims at understanding what strategies fitness centre use in order to attract and retain customers. It interests also in a categorization of such strategies in order to spot those which are the most efficient. The research question this paper is based on is: What are the communication strategies which attract the most members and potential members of fitness centre?

The authors found this theme necessary in order to understand why fitness centre know such success nowadays. Hence studying their communication strategies, and particularly the most efficient ones, helps understanding the relationships companies and customers have together. To reach this goal, the authors first used a theoretical approach in order to build up a marketing frame around the subject.

Then they process data collection thanks to interviews and a questionnaire. Analysis phase aims at analysing factors and patterns. The interviews were processed in priority because they were used to define habits and issues fitness centre have. It results in reshaping the questionnaire in order to get the right data from customers and non-customers.

In order to respond to the research question, the authors mixed results from interviews and the questionnaire in order to have a global picture of tendencies.

The very first tools the authors examined were the Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning strategies used by companies in order to spot, target and attract customers.

Segmentation is used to attract customers and understand them by dividing the market in smaller, homogenous segments. The authors noticed the predominance of prices and location factors when segmenting the market concerning fitness customers. Indeed most fitness centre differentiates their offer compare to competitors and focus on location near structures grouping potential or unsatisfied customers. Such strategies work pretty well since many customers declared beneficiating from special prices or a proper location compared to their living places.

The targeting strategies cumulate mixed results. Indeed fitness centre do not focus on only one category. Nonetheless they tend to attract young people from 20 to 30 years old. Hence they beneficiate from the high proximity youngsters have together, increasing word of mouth, which is very important for fitness clubs. Moreover fitness centre get more and more
partnerships with structures potential customers are already familiar with. People get more personal, more willing to try more rapidly.

However the authors noticed troubles fitness centre have to get feedback. Reversing the communication sense is still hard. Communication is predominantly from companies to customers.

Finally, positioning shows that indirect communication does not have a clear effect on people’s mind. Indeed, the authors noticed some customers may not realize how far indirect communication has a powerful influence over their choices. As a matter of fact the authors saw during face to face questionnaires the impact of unconscious communication. Some customers did not clearly mention they consider fitness centre image as important, but still said that their choices may be influenced by similar factors (notoriety, functionality, skilled employees…).

Hence positioning could be consider as a great tool to bring back customers and retain them as far as the company still have control over their positioning in customers’ mind.

Then in a second time the authors went through the communication mix in order to find out more possibilities to tackle the research question.

The first tool the authors studied is sales promotion. This tool seems important for fitness centre since customers require experimentation before any decision. Free trials as well as free training sessions with a coach are decisive. They answer both needs for experimentation and personal approach. This tool is common in fitness centre and differentiating the offer seems pretty hard. Nonetheless sales promotion is an attractive tool which enables companies to convince customers more easily.

The second tool is public relations. This tool can be linked with the positioning notions readers may find earlier. Indeed this part of the communication mix underlines the importance of notoriety and functionality when customers decide whether to take a membership or to stay in a particular centre. The image the centre broadcasts is very important since it impacts what people say about your firm and how they see it. When one know that word of mouth is the first factor linking customers and firms, such tool must be used carefully.

Third tool important for companies is the publicity. Many customers admitted a nice publicity joined with attractive prices could convince them on taking a membership. This tool must be shaped in order to include a personal dimension. Indeed the study revealed mass communication advertising tools work badly when it comes to attract people.
Finally events and experiences are considered as one of the best tool according to the authors since it helps members to feel part of a community hence retaining them longer. Moreover the authors mentioned during the analysis that such tools deeply increase the number of interactions between customers and brands.

The authors already mentioned advertising as a poorly efficient tool when it comes to attract customers. Another one authors mentioned is direct marketing. In fact during the analysis, the examination of empirical findings showed customers are not specially sensitive to direct marketing. This tool is more efficient when it comes to provide feedback. Indeed customers prefer to use these channels of communication when they want to transmit a message to the brand. Personal selling on the other hand has also mixed results. It is said personal training is not very efficient for fitness members who generally prefer training on their own or with friends rather than paying extra fees for a personal session.

But non-members often mention personal training as a factor which could influence them to take a membership. Using this tool could be efficient to attract part of non-members who seek for a personal following. But it does not increase the expenses for customers who are already members.

In the end the authors concluded that family, friends and experiences are tools companies should insist on in order to increase the word of mouth factor. Such tools are really efficient when combined to more traditional tools (sales promotion, public relations, events...).

The authors ended the analysis with two special focuses: services and customer relationship management. First services are considered nowadays as a factor for differentiation. It is a source for differentiation since the quality of the services will influence the customer/firm relationships. It is particularly important for customers who need a personal following. Hence it is linked to free trials and personal training which are two other important factors. Even though people are not interested in personal training, results from the questionnaire mentioned the importance of services as a whole.

As a consequence the quality of services is determinant to keep customers coming to the facility and extend their loyalty to the firm. The authors noticed that skilled employees providing high quality services will help members to work out in proper conditions as well as giving to non-members motivation by proposing adapted personal following.
On the other hand the customer relationship management cumulates different results. The importance of community aware strategy showed an increased in feedback provision. Hence such communication strategy increases loyalty and the ability for customers to express their opinions. It shows also that customers would be more willing to communicate with relatives, increasing the firm’s visibility. However data, such as extra goods purchase, show no influence over the customer extension. Community aware strategy is an important factor to keep customers and make them talk with relatives about how good a fitness centre can be. It puts in place an efficient communication strategy which positioned existing customers at the centre of the strategy.

6.1 Limitations

The study is limited by the several factors. The first and probably the most important is the profusion of fitness centre.

The authors tried to draw a pattern that could fit almost every centre. Nonetheless the important number of centre raises an issue. Each one is different and they all try to create new, different concepts. Many respondents questioned the authors about possible questions that could be included in the questionnaire. Nonetheless the authors could not introduce every subject within a single thesis and questionnaire.

Moreover the speed with which the market is changing is really important. Indeed nowadays companies try to develop concepts such as fitness centre only for women or elderly. However these centre represent exceptions, and could not be taken as relevant enough to draw a frame that could include both general centre and exceptions.

Moreover the authors would have liked to increase the number of centre concerned by interviews. Indeed the two interviewed centre are in Halmstad. But time restriction as well as the important number of centre who did not answer or refused could not allow the authors to increase this number.

Finally, still concerning the interviews, the authors would have liked to interview a high level decision-maker. Indeed the answers of employees working in the headquarters of an international company such as Sats would have been really interesting. However it seemed really difficult to take time with such high level people within such reduced period.
6.2 Recommendations

For any future research, the authors would recommend a study which includes international comparisons. Indeed any person who would like to go deeper in the subject would have interesting results if studying several centres in different countries. Doing so would include interviews made by internet rather than by face to face. Studying different approaches would provide more diversity in the offers or the segmentation. Different pattern would be recognised like the age factor or the prices.

Another possibility that could be developed in any future project would be concerning fitness centre activity with another field of marketing. It may be particularly interesting to focus on sensitive marketing. This field is often mentioned in retail studies. However understanding how far sensitive marketing goes in fitness members’ decisions could provide interesting conclusions.

Finally the authors’ advice for future studies to concentrate on purchasing habits from customers in the fitness world. Indeed the purchasing habits of customers have been rapidly mentioned all along this thesis. Nonetheless it seems interesting to focus on how customers approach such expenses; which determinants are more or less efficient to push customers to buy extra goods?

6.3 Implication

This study concluded on the importance of communication channels, particularly attracting friends and family, in getting and retaining customers longer. This study may be interesting for academic research concerning any studies seeking to understand the impacts of external factors over communication strategy. This study may be interesting also for researchers who are interested in any of the subjects mentioned earlier. Finally this study may be useful for people who seek at understanding how communication mix may be implemented in sport facilities providing both services and goods.
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8.1 Interview at Actic (HALMSTAD Arena)

Antoine Tocco (T), Nicolas Blanchard (B), David (D)

T: Ok once again is it ok for you if we record the interview?

D: Yes for sure

T: Ok thanks you. So first question, can you introduce rapidly your fitness centre?

D: Yes we have around 2000 customers and the daily number is far less obviously, I would say most of our customers never attend the centre what so ever. Could you please lead me? What else do you want to know?

T: Then number of employees if it is possible

D: There is one full time and there is two part times and I think there is four people coming at hours only. Like our centre does not have any classes but we have got a couple of personal trainers who are coming to work out just with one person but no classes what so ever.

T: Do you have managers among you who organise the process?

D: We have got a boss at this place, and above her we have a boss controlling what is happening in the whole Halland or in South West Sweden maybe. And then it goes in three or four steps above her.

T: Thanks, when does the gym was created here?

D: Oh, I do not really remember but we can look up after, but I think it was about the same date that this building (Halmstad Arena) was built but I cannot remember exactly the date, I think 4 or 5 years ago maybe.

N: Ok, just a question about how much is the fee? How much do we have to pay to become a member at your centre?

D: There is a starting fee, starting at 550 kr, which is for signing up. That fee you pay only once and for that you get a part of us starting up your account, you also get three times where we help you building up how you should working out. Apart from this you also have multiple
prices like your working situation age and stuff, so we got like student prices starting from 309kr per month if you sign up for a year. It is more expensive if you are signing up for four months, and you cannot sign up for one month. I think if you are not a student it is like 359kr.

N: Per month, for one year?

D: Per month for one year, and again it is more expensive if you sign up for four months. And then there is also a price for elderly but I cannot remember, it is approximatively the same price as students, but we can check that up later.

T: Ok, so you have different prices for different categories of persons?

D: Exactly both, categories of person and for how long you sign up.

T: Ok

D: Again it is just for here, you can also buy, and there is another price if you want to be able to use all the Actic facilities in Sweden. It is a little bit higher, I think it is 500 for regular people but I can’t remember the price for students. We got it all out there.

T: Ok

D: And then of course we are having different prices for companies we are working together with.

N: So you have partnership with companies?

D: Yes you can say so.

T: Ok, the next question, how would describe your communication strategy? I mean the way you are acting to get customers.

D: I think it is mainly through social media, like Facebook and stuff like this. Obviously we got a website. We in person, the staff, are visiting companies; schools etc… and then we got also bus advertising, billboards.

T: Ok so you are using it. And flyers or other stuff?

D: Yes, sometimes but that is not common, it is not like we are going in town and spread flyers all over the place but we are more specific generally like going to a school and then bringing flyers and offering something and dragging them along, something like that.
T: Ok and according to you, which one is the most efficient?

D: I have not seen in a day how many clicks do we have on Facebook and how many of them have signed up, I have no idea but my opinion would be that when we go out to like a school or a company, we tend to bring a lot of people back to the facility.

N: You mean personal contact is more efficient?

D: I think so. At least, in a qualitative manner, per person that we meet, I think that we will bring in more if we meet them in person. But then again if we use Facebook we can touch more people.

N: You mean qualitative is more efficient, meaning that among the people you are touching it will lead to more people coming to your fitness centre.

D: Yes I say so, and then the percentage will be higher if we meet them in person. But then again if talk about being time efficient, then it may be more efficient to use Facebook or things like that.

T: Yes social Medias.

D: Again when we go out in person it is like maybe we go out two or three people to meet like twenty or thirty people, and we bring back something like 50% of them. Again it could be like we are working for one or two hours, so it could be adapted to six hours maybe and then we bring like 15 people. Then I don’t know what it costs to put something on Facebook and let hundreds and thousands of people read about it.

T: Ok, so that is a question about the goods, selling goods in extra, but you were saying that it is not possible there.

D: Here it is not possible because there is another restaurant in the same building.

T: But you would do it if it was possible?

D: Absolutely, the other facilities do. We have two other facilities, one in town and one in Flygstaden. Both sell stuff.

T: Do you know if it is working well?

D: Yes I think so.
T: Are members buying it a lot?

D: Yes a lot.

T: Ok, who take the decisions regarding communication strategies and are the other employees aware of it? Is it collective or is it only about few people in the firm?

D: It depends on the level, it is a question about cost. For example if we, in this facility alone would like to go out to a school, we can make the decision ourselves. Even I as an employee, can come up with an idea and do it. Of course they will ask me questions about it, and say if you have to get a specific number of people back, but when it is bigger thinks, centrally, they do it from Stockholm.

T: Ok, so you say about how many times per year you revise your strategy you said, you don’t know?

D: Yes

T: Ok that’s fine. How are you dealing with the feedback of customers?

D: The feedback that we get here are mainly about this facility. Then obviously we deal it alone from here, then sometimes people have feedbacks about how the company works in the bigger level.

N: Something more global? About the image of the brand, the social aspect, building a community for example?

D: I can put like this, if it is about the facility specifically, then we are the one dealing with it but if it is about price setting or the kind of equipment we use here in Actic, then we have to pass that higher up.

T: Is personal training a big part of your business? I mean regarding adherents, is the main part coming by herself or personal training is important?

D: We talked about that couple of weeks ago, and I can’t exactly remember the number but I know that they want to expand the part about personal training. But I am quite sure the main part of our income comes from the payment of membership, normal membership. But the strategy that they are trying to get through right now is that you could sell one hour of personal training for a fix price and then again they are trying to instead of changing what we
give to customer, they are changing the way customer pays. So now they try to get customer to sign up membership for personal training as well.

T: Is there a plan to communicate better to attract people for personal training?

D: They put that quite a lot on the personal trainers, because the way it works is that as a personal trainer you can work behind the desk and then it is like a regular work but as a personal trainer you have to bring the customer yourself and they put that on the personal trainers, so us.

N: Is it possible in your facility to make a single try for example? Just come saying I pay 50kr and come just once to try for example.

D: Yes that is possible and you can also get another thing that is possible, is that you can get an hour with an instructor but not a personal trainer for free without singing up. That is obviously for them a way to try to get people to sign up.

T: Then they try it, if it is good for them they pay after and take the membership

D: Yes exactly

T: So it is a way for you to attract the customer

D: Yes

N: I just have a question also, how do you get feedbacks? Do you have a little box with written feedbacks on it? Or do you ask them by mail?

D: Yes we have got a box that works for this facility

N: This is what you mean by local feedbacks?

D: Yes exactly, but it is both through a box and through personal communication, like face to face communication. But obviously we like people to email as well and I think that on our website, there is somewhere that you can complain, it is just email. So it is both through email and personal contact, you know dropping a letter in a box and stuff.

T: Do you have some meetings to read these feedbacks and decide together how to improve your offer?
D: Mainly it is like if the feedback is about the machines for example, then the one in charge of the machine together with the boss maybe is dealing with it, and if it is about not being clean at the facility then it is the cleaner’s job and so on. So we rarely deal with the problem all of us together. We have got different skills and stuff we have to worry about.

T: The last question was about the machines, how you place the machines? Is it thought? I mean the cardio before for example

D: Yes, like aerobic exercise or cardio in one part and then freeweight in one part and machines in one part, and the freeweight part there is no specific order of where things are put it is just like there is a mirror here and we should put something that we could put in front of the mirror obviously. But when it comes to the machines we have got like a route that is easy for the client to walk, it is like a logical order, a good way to train, going from this machine to this machine or this machine. Then we put them in that order.

T: You have another question?

N: Just do you think colours are important? I mean do you have requirement for example put some blue because it is nice to see? Do you have these kind of more implicit things for example about decoration?

D: Yes I think there are codes, like for us employees there are dress codes, to wear like black and blue

N: Like having some sport shoes

D: Yes that is a good example, we need to have sport shoes and we cannot show our knees. I think also in the rooms obviously I do not think you will find an Actic facility with an orange wall. Blue is the colour.

T: I think we have what we needed, thank you for your time.

8.2 Interview at SATS

Antoine TOCCO (T); Christopher from Sats (S).

T: Do you mind if we record the interview?

S: No, no problem.
T: Thank you. The first question is about the fitness centre. Mainly, can you introduce it rapidly about some general things, number of adherents, the price basically and date of creation?

S: Basically, we have been here for roughly 15 years, we have about 1300 hundred members and growing each day actually so that is fun. The prices are a little bit depending on the membership that you like. Basically, we have a three months membership or a twelve months membership and then we have also a lower price for students as well as different companies that have agreements with us. So basically, we have better prices for students and companies that have a sort of agreement. But roughly it starts from 395kr a month and down.

T: Ok and what about the employees working for the fitness centre, how many are they?

S: We have, working full time, we have two people and we have two working on 50%, we have 24 group training instructors, 3 personal trainers with a fourth one coming this summer and that is about it so roughly the staffs is about 30 persons.

T: Are there some managers who control the whole thing, the whole process?

S: Sats is a really big fitness chain, the big chain is called Sats ELIXIA so basically last year or two years ago, a big chain called ELIXIA merged with Sats. Sats itself is about 90 centres all over Sweden and many other ones in Norway and in Finland. Then ELIXIA has centres in a couple of countries as well. This two big chains work together so just in Sweden, we are about half a million members.

T: Ok so it is such a very big group?

S: Yes, it is a really big group. It is one of the biggest.

T: How would you describe the communication strategy that you have to attract customers?

S: To attract customers, we have a lot of different strategies. Here in HALMSTAD, we do things a little bit differently from the big cities. In Stockholm for example, SATS, I think we have 65 centres in Stockholm at the moment, basically, there is one around every corner. So that in itself is a marketing strategy.

It is everywhere, so basically, if you want a centre and a place to train the gym; Sats is the best place to go in Stockholm and this in itself is Marketing as well as we do stands, stand and promote our fitness centres one by one. Plus we have sales teams, each time we have
somebody who come to try the workout, we always offer one free trial workout and then we can book them for a group training session or they can try the gym as one and then we get their information. Once we have this information, we can send it to our sales team who call these people up and see if they want to become members.

T: So mainly it is about direct marketing and e-mail as well as phone call?

S: Yes we do all of it as well. But because we are as big as we are in Sweden, every single person in Sweden knows about SATS, even if you are from far up in the North, they know that Sats does exist down, it is that big. So I think that if we have a logo in a newspaper, it is marketing as well but we do not do like telemarketing and so on, no.

T: Do you think that they are some specific communication techniques that work especially for fitness centres that are used by fitness centres and could not be used elsewhere?

S: This is a controversial question. But yes of course, there are, I am sorry to say that fitness is in a big part about looking good. Basically, the marketing that you promote, I mean there are different strategies that you can do but yes, looking good sales. So basically, this one of the biggest reason that people comes here. Of course, this is what we want to promote to grow our members. As well as if we draw it a little bit further, look at feeling well, having a functional body and so on; this is what we are trying to market. Get the training to work in everyday life, not just being something about looking good but also feeling good, strong and feeling secure and so on.

T: Just, when you are talking about looking good, you mean as your personal trainers have to look good?

S: No, no, no, not at all. We have three different personal trainers now, we all look different, and there is no like dress code, no look. The only thing we have to wear is one of this shirt but we a lot of different, we have long arms and big ones; if you want to wear something bigger it is possible. It has nothing to do with looks. You can say like this, when you work as a personal trainer, you work on an hourly pay. Basically, the more hours you work, the more cash you get, it is not much simpler than that, it does not get much simpler than that.

If you work for 8 hours a day and you keep smiling, the work day can be pretty long and just like other people doing other kinds of jobs have hard time doing training in their daily schedule, it is the same for a personal trainer. If you work for 8 hours a day, then, maybe you
do not have time to work out every single day and focus on looking good. That has nothing to do with it. Many of our best trainers do not focus on look good, they work a lot and they practice their skills a lot and this is more important. But of course, it helps, by marketing, it helps looking good. I think it does.

T: For you, what is the most efficient tool, I mean to attract customers? If it would be just one tool, are the free trials, social networks…?

S: No, the absolutely greatest tool that you can get is word of mouth, when you have a customer, a member, one of your clients that you work out with who recommend you or me, nothing beats that.

T: Ok so it is the better thing according to you?

S: Yes.

T: We saw that you propose extra goods such as T-shirts or shoes or other stuffs, is it working well for you, is it an important part of your business?

S: Here in HALMSTAD no, not really. It helps that it is available but it is not something that we make money from. I am sorry to say it, it would be nice if the little store we have actually benefit us a little bit but no we do not do any huge money from that. But it is nice that we have protein bars and proteins shakes and all the other stuffs that we sell as well as bananas and so on. That is helps; we do have some incomes from that but not to the extent that we would want.

T: The main part of your business is mainly about the memberships of course?

S: Yes, the memberships, the month membership is what drawn all the money.

T: Who take the decision regarding communication strategies and are all the employees aware of it? Is it taken collectively?

S: Yes, we have two bosses basically here; we have my boss, Danis who is responsible for the centre as a whole, him, in return has is boss who is in charge of all the centres in south of Sweden and that guy has a boss who communicate to all the centres in Sweden.

Then, there is the highest type of persons; there are basically the people who control the whole community basically. Under Danis, here on this centre, there is me, I am the one who
has the control of the group training as well as all the instructors so that is my responsibility, the communication to the instructors.

T: How are you dealing with the feedbacks of the customers? Is there a way to collect it and then analyze it?

S: Yes, each week, there are six random feedback formulas being e-mailed out to a random customer, basically, six hundred each week. Our customers or members get a response to it if they like anonymously. So basically, that give us some feedbacks and in that formulas, there are questions about how they like it at the centre, if they think that this is clean, if they like the staff, if they think that there is anything they like to change and they rate the centre from a scale from one to ten.

T: Do you have an important response rate on this feedback? Is it providing you a lot of answers?

S: Yes it does. Even if it is only six hundred going out each week, that is a lot in an entire year. So basically, we have statistics that we get every week from all the centres, both on members in and members out, how these members that we have feel about the centre and we get that from these formulas.

The big part is also we have a reception that everyone goes through. So each member that goes in, they draw the card and look us in the eye and we have to look them in the eye and actually ask them, “Yeah, how do you feel”? So that is probably the biggest communication feed right there, that we actually do get a talk to every single person that goes in there. We have about 1300 members, about 800 of them are active more than once a week, so that means that 800 of them, we get to look them in the eyes and ask to have their feedback.

T: Once you have the feedback, when it is big problems, how are you acting to correct it?

S: If for example somebody says that… some feedback, you cannot do anything about, some of them say “well we would like a bigger space, we would like more space”. Right now, there is not more space available; we have no more places we can get. You get that kind of feedback ant that part, we just have to ignore because you cannot do anything with it. But if somebody gives information about for example “the shower is dirty”, ok then we clean the shower, and there is no problem with that.
But in these feedback formulas, we always fix what we can. Then we look at the rest to see if we can do something differently. For example, the space thing is a recurring feedback that we actually get. It gets pretty much crowded in the Monday afternoon and it would be nice with extra 2000 thousands square meters but we do not have that but we know that it could be nice.

**T:** You were talking about space, is the disposition of the machines and so on is thought by your team, make it in a certain way to communicate about certain things.

**S:** Yeah, yes of course it is. How we place the machines and everything is how to make easy as possible for the customer. I will not tell the names but there are other centres in HALMSTAD where it is actually looks as they just dump the machines. If you look down to our machines park and everything that we have, there is a thought behind it.

For example, our treadmills are higher up than our bikes; basically the treadmills are behind the bikes so everybody get to see the television. The other way around, then nobody would get to see the television if they were on bikes.

We have everything stated that if you want to train back, the back machines are collected and there are placed in a way where our members do not have to sit and look at somebody in another machines straight in the eyes just because it is placed that way. So yes there is a thought behind everything. Otherwise, it would be stupid.

**T:** Would you say there is a kind of path through which each customer can go. For example, is there a zone for each type of training?

**S:** Yes. Like I said, we have tried to get not a system because neither I nor my boss thinks that a system to train that is composed by us is the best way to do it, this is the big part. Everybody has to make up their own mind and we can help people, we can help every single one to “ok you want to do this exercise, and then we help them”. But no, we do not have a certain line that you work through to complete your workout and so on.

Everyone that gets a membership with us, they get two meetings with a personal trainer for free. We give them a chance to not perhaps teach them everything but give them a sort of foundation. They at least can get started and at least have a thought about how they should work out to give them safe and make sure that they get close to the results that they want.

**T:** Almost the last question, are you thinking that the visual is important in a fitness centre, the colours and all this stuff, people are coming, it looks good and then it is a reason explaining why they take the membership.
S: Yes it is, this is almost the easiest question that you have given me. Yes that is very important. It does not matter if the colours are… but it should look nice, it has to look nice. If it is not, people will not come here. They pay and give money because it looks good.

T: Well, I think it is perfect for us, thank you very much, it will be very helpful.
8.3 Questionnaire

Survey communication strategies around fitness centre

1. Age *
   Âge

2. Gender *
   Sexe
   Plusieurs réponses possibles:
   
   [ ] Male / Homme
   [ ] Female / Femme

3. Are you a member of a fitness centre? *
   Êtes-vous membre d'une salle de sport ?
   Une seule réponse possible.
   
   [ ] Yes / Oui   Après avoir répondu à la dernière question de cette section,
   [ ] No / Non    passez à la question 5.

4. Nationality *
   Nationalité

If you are a member:

5. Which fitness centre are you going to?
   (Name and city) *
   Quelle salle de sport fréquentez-vous ?
   (Nom et ville)
6. How did you get in touch with the fitness centre you are going in? *
   Comment êtes-vous entré en contact avec la salle de sport que vous fréquentez ?
   Plusieurs réponses possibles:
   □ Word of mouth / Bouche à oreille
   □ Advertising / Publicité
   □ Free trials / Essais gratuits
   □ Email & phone calls / Email & appels téléphoniques
   □ Social networks / Réseaux sociaux
   □ Autre: ________________________________

7. How important were the following aspects when deciding on the membership? (1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important) *
   Que était le degré d'importance des éléments suivants lorsque vous avez soucnnu un abonnement ? (1 étant insignifiant et 5 extrêmement important)
   Une seule réponse possible par ligne.
   
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8. How frequently are you going to the gym? (Sessions per week) *
   A quelle fréquence allez-vous à la salle de sport ? (Nombre d'entrainements par semaine)
   Une seule réponse possible.
   □ 0
   □ 1
   □ 2
   □ 3
   □ 4
   □ 5
   □ 5 and more

9. How long in average is your training session? (in minutes) *
   Combien de temps en moyenne dure votre entraînement ? (in minutes)
   _____________________________________________
10. How much are you interested in personal training? *
A quel point êtes-vous intéressé(e) par le coaching personnel ?
Une seule réponse possible.

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11. For what reasons are you loyal to your fitness centre? *
Pour quelles raisons êtes-vous fidèles à votre salle de sport ?
Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Attractive prices / Prix attractif
- Promotional offers / Offres promotionnelles
- Skilled employees / Employés compétents
- Modern facilities / Equipements modernes
- Community / Communauté

12. Does your fitness centre sell extra goods? (Clothes, food, drinks...) *
Est-ce que votre salle de sport vend des produits complémentaires ? (Vêtements, nourriture, boissons...)
Une seule réponse possible.

- Yes / Oui
- No / Non

13. What is the main marketing tool used to promote them? (1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important) *
Quel est le principal outil marketing utilisé pour promouvoir ces produits ? (1 étant insignifiant et 5 extrêmement important)
Une seule réponse possible par ligne.

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14. Did you ever buy some of these extra goods?
Avez-vous déjà acheté certains de ces produits complémentaires ?
Une seule réponse possible.

- Yes / Oui
- No / Non
15. Does your fitness centre propose promotional offers if you attract new members? *  
(friends, family...) *
Est-ce que votre salle de sport propose des offres avantageuses si vous attirez de nouveaux membres ? (amis, famille...)
Une seule réponse possible.
☐ Yes / Oui
☐ No / Non

16. Are you providing feedback to your fitness centre? *
Formulez-vous des recommandations auprès de votre salle de sport ?
Une seule réponse possible.
☐ Yes / Oui
☐ No / Non

17. How? (Email, Feedback box...)
Comment ? (Email, Dîche de satisfaction...)

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18. To conclude, are you thinking that communication has an impact on your decisions regarding fitness centre? (Please develop your answer, and provide examples if possible)
Pour conclure, pensez-vous que les techniques de communication des salles de sport ont un impact sur vous ? (Pouvez-vous développer votre réponse, et donnez des exemples si possible)

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19. Click here to end the questionnaire, thank you for your help! *
Cliquez ici pour finir le questionnaire, merci de votre participation !
Une seule réponse possible.
☐ End the question / Finir le questionnaire

If you are not a member:
Si vous n’êtes pas membre:
20. For what reason(s) aren't you going to a fitness centre?

Pour quelle(s) raison(s) ne fréquentez-vous pas une salle de sport?
Pléausr responses possible:

☐ Dislike / N'aime pas
☐ Never heard about it / Jamais entendu parlé
☐ Not enough time / Pas assez de temps
☐ Too expensive / Trop cher
☐ Too far / Trop loin
☐ Autre: ______________________________

21. Have you ever heard about fitness centre before? (prices, special offers, training process...)?

Avez-vous déjà entendu parler d'une salle de sport? (prix, offres spéciales, formules d'entraînements...)

Une seule réponse possible.

☐ Yes / Oui
☐ No / Non

22. If yes, through which channel(s)?

Si oui, via quel(s) outil(s) de communication?

Pléausre responses possible:

☐ Social networks / Réseaux sociaux
☐ Billboards / Panneaux publicitaires
☐ Friends / Amis
☐ Fame / Renommée
☐ Email & Phone calls / Email & appels téléphoniques
☐ Telemarketing / Télémarketing
☐ Autre: ______________________________

23. How likely is it that the following aspects would change your view on fitness centre

(1 being insignificant and 5 extremely important)

A quelle hauteur les éléments suivants pourraient vous faire changer d'avis sur les salles de sport? (1 étant insignifiant et 5 extrêmement important)

Une seule réponse possible par ligne.

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24. To conclude, are you thinking that communication has an impact on your decisions regarding fitness centre? (Please develop your answer, and provide examples if possible)

Pour conclure, pensez-vous que les techniques de communication des salles de sport ont un impact sur vous ? (Pouvez-vous développer votre réponse, et donnez des exemples si possible)
My name is Nicolas Blanchard, I am 19 years old, I am a French student in Rouen where I was born. I study in NEOMA Business School (Rouen). I wrote this thesis during my exchange year in Halmstad, Sweden.

My name is Antoine Tocco, I was born in 1994 in Lyon, France. I am a 21 years old student specialized in management strategies at Em Lyon Business School. I wrote this thesis in collaboration with Nicolas Blanchard at Halmstad University, Sweden.