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EDITORIAL

QUAND LES ÉMOTIONS S’(EN/EM)MÊLENT : LE MARKETING DIGITAL SOUS LE PRISME DES ÉMOTIONS ! WHEN EMOTIONS GET MIXED UP: DIGITAL MARKETING THROUGH THE PRISM OF EMOTIONS!

Les émotions sont omniprésentes dans nos vies. Les intelligences artificielles sont désormais entraînées à interpréter les expressions faciales afin d’adapter leurs réponses et de susciter une contagion émotionnelle favorable à la marque dans le public concerné (Kramer et al. 2014). Elles deviennent de plus en plus sophistiquées, croisant plusieurs indices visuels, du langage corporel aux vêtements, en passant par l’environnement. Avec R1-Omni, l’objectif d’Alibaba est de rendre l’IA encore plus humaine, en étant capable de décoder des signaux que les humains perçoivent souvent sans même y penser¹.

Depuis les travaux fondateurs de Mehrabian et Russel (1974), le rôle des émotions dans l’expérience entre une marque et un consommateur n’est plus à démontrer (Valette-Florence et Valette-Florence, 2012), y compris dans l’univers digital (Ahmad et Guzman, 2021). Porat et Tractinsky (2012) ont ainsi établi le rôle de l’affect dans les réponses aux sites marchands, le plaisir étant le médiateur principal entre le design du site et l’attitude à l’égard du magasin. Il est très loin le temps où l’on pouvait penser que l’irruption du digital en marketing aurait essentiellement pour effet de pouvoir découpler les informations factuelles transmises aux consommateurs, permettant ainsi une extension considérable de la vieille VPC ; les dimensions « nobles » de la communication restant l’apanage des médias traditionnels. Aujourd’hui, la tendance est inversée car si les émotions peuvent librement s’exprimer sur les communautés virtuelles, avec les dérives possibles que l’on connaît, les médias traditionnels sont prisonniers d’idéologies paralysantes et de réglementations tatillonnes. Les réseaux sociaux deviennent ainsi des espaces de liberté pour l’expression des émotions pour le meilleur et parfois pour le pire.

Les articles de ce numéro s’intéressent aux émotions produites, induites ou relayées à travers le digital, qu’il s’agisse de communautés en ligne, d’agents conversationnels, de réseaux sociaux ou encore d’outils digitaux mis à disposition des clients en magasin.

L’article de Pierre Buffaz et Virginie Rodriguez, intitulé « *Anti-brand virtual communities: Analysis of the influence of the organisation, social links and discourse of members of two communities on their felt hatred and behaviours* », s’intéresse à la nature des échanges entre membres au sein de communautés virtuelles anti-marques. A travers une netnographie réalisée au sein de deux communautés distinctes (“Les Râleurs en ColRER E” et “Les mécontents de SFR”), les auteurs mettent en évidence une typologie des manifestations selon un continuum allant de la haine gelée (absence de participation active à la communauté) à la haine ardente (refus de payer pour le service). Finalement, les bénéfices recherchés par les membres sont identiques à ceux des membres de communautés d’amoureux de marques : l’information, le lien social, l’entraide et la visibilité.

L’article de Christine Petr et Charlotte De Sainte Maresville, intitulé « Facial expressions in conversational AI: the hot trend that boosts empathy but flops on trust », s’intéresse à l’impact de l’humanisation des agents conversationnels sur les réactions des internautes. Un design expérimental exposant les participants à deux agents conversationnels met en exergue les effets contrastés du recours à des expressions faciales dynamiques. Si elles renforcent la proximité émotionnelle et l’empathie perçue, elles réduisent la transparence perçue et la qualité des conseils fournis. Les résultats obtenus militent pour une approche contextualisée du recours à l’humanisation des agents conversationnels, prenant en compte la sensibilité de la tâche et les attentes de l’utilisateur.

Emotions are omnipresent in our lives. Artificial intelligence is now trained to interpret facial expressions in order to adapt its responses and elicit emotional contagion favorable to the brand in the target audience (Kramer et al. 2014). It is becoming increasingly sophisticated, combining several visual cues, from body language to clothing and the environment. With R1-Omni, Alibaba’s goal is to make AI even more human by enabling it to decode signals that humans often perceive without even thinking about it.

Since the seminal work of Mehrabian and Russel (1974), the role of emotions in the experience between a brand and a consumer has been well established (Valette-Florence and Valette-Florence, 2012), including in the digital world (Ahmad and Guzman, 2021). Porat and Tractinsky (2012) established the role of emotion in responses to e-commerce sites, with pleasure being the main mediator between site design and attitude toward the store. Gone are the days when it was thought that the advent of digital marketing would essentially serve to increase the amount of factual information transmitted to consumers tenfold, thereby enabling a considerable expansion of traditional mail order, with the “noble” dimensions of communication remaining the preserve of traditional media. Today, the trend has been reversed, because while emotions can be freely expressed in virtual communities, with the possible excesses that we are familiar with, traditional media are prisoners of paralyzing ideologies and nitpicky regulations. Social networks are thus becoming spaces of freedom for the expression of emotions, for better and sometimes for worse.

The articles in this issue focus on emotions produced, induced, or relayed through digital media, whether in online communities, chatbots, social networks, or digital tools made available to customers in stores.

The article by Pierre Buffaz and Virginie Rodriguez, entitled “Anti-brand virtual communities: Analysis of the influence of the organization, social links, and discourse of members of two communities on their felt hatred and behaviors,” examines the nature of exchanges between members within anti-brand virtual communities. Through netnography conducted within two distinct communities (“Les Râleurs en ColRER E” and “Les mécontents de SFR”), the authors highlight a typology of manifestations along a continuum ranging from frozen hatred (lack of active participation in the community) to ardent hatred (refusal to pay for the service). Ultimately, the benefits sought by members are identical to those sought by members of brand-loving communities: information, social connection, mutual support, and visibility.

The article by Christine Petr and Charlotte De Sainte Maresville, entitled “Facial expressions in conversational AI: the hot trend that boosts empathy but flops on trust,” looks at the impact of the humanization of conversational agents on the reactions of Internet users. An experimental design exposing participants to two conversational agents highlights the contrasting effects of using dynamic facial expressions. While they strengthen emotional closeness and perceived empathy, they reduce perceived transparency and the quality of the advice provided. The results obtained argue for a contextualized approach to the use of humanization in conversational agents, taking into account the sensitivity of the task and user expectations.

The article by Jean-François Lemoine and Simon Régnier, entitled “The influence of the characteristics of product placement on social media on internet users’ responses: a

L’article de Jean-François Lemoine et Simon Régnier, intitulé « L’influence des caractéristiques d’un placement de produit sur les réseaux sociaux sur les réponses des internautes : une étude qualitative sur YouTube », met en lumière une dimension additionnelle dans la réception des placements de marques par les consommateurs : la divulgation ou non du lien qui unit le vidéaste avec la marque. Cette caractéristique est celle qui génère le plus d’émotions chez les répondants. Dans le cas où le vidéaste cherche à dissimuler la tentative de persuasion ou n’est pas suffisamment explicite sur sa démarche, cela semble vécu comme une trahison susceptible de générer de l’énervement, de la tristesse voire du dégoût. Ce résultat fait écho aux travaux de Portes et al. (2020) sur la transparence numérique. Au-delà d’une divulgation d’informations visibles et intelligibles, l’entreprise doit faire preuve d’ouverture en donnant la liberté aux clients de discuter avec elle sur tous les canaux de communication.

Pour conclure ce numéro, l’article de Mariana Vlad, Annabel Martin et Aurély Lao, intitulé “Enhancing the shopping well-being: the role of in-store digital tools”, étudie dans quelle mesure la pratique du shopping peut être source de bien-être pour l’individu. Les résultats des deux études réalisées établissent que l’usage de dispositifs digitaux en magasin accroît la valeur hédonique de la visite, et de ce fait le bien-être associé au shopping. A contrario, les outils digitaux n’ont pas d’influence sur la valeur utilitaire qui ne présente pas de relation significative avec le bien-être associé à la visite. Les résultats mettent également en exergue que le bien-être associé au shopping est renforcé par les perceptions de compétence et d’autonomie à l’égard des outils digitaux.

¹ <https://siecledigital.fr/2025/03/13/alibaba-veut-donner-des-emotions-a-lia-une-riposte-directe-a-openai/>

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Anti-brand virtual communities:

Analysis of the influence of the organisation, social links and discourse of members of two communities on their felt hatred and behaviours

Abstract :

This research aims to provide a better understanding of: the content of exchanges between members to decipher the nature of their hatred, the organizational and social structure in place to identify influence games and the strength of ties between members, and the intensity of members' hatred and the behaviours corresponding to each level. A netnographic approach was implemented within two French anti-brand virtual communities. A total of 1,000 verbatims from each community were analyzed. Beyond the categorisation of members' publications into four categories, based on the work of Fetscherin (2019) and Granovetter (1973), we highlight, on the one hand, a new level of hatred (frozen hate) which translates into grumbling in silence, and, on the other hand, that the strength of the social links depends on the sector of activity of the targeted brand. The fundamental interest of this research lies in its ability to demonstrate that virtual anti-brand communities are self-organizing, developing a form of propaganda that concomitantly fosters members' hatred of the brand, but also building up solidarity between them to compensate for brand failures. By the way, these communities could act as whistleblowers and call on public authorities to force companies to improve their quality of service.

Keywords: *anti-brand communities; brand hate; social networks; brand relations; netnography.*

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INTRODUCTION

Despite their best efforts, brands can find it difficult to honor promises made to customers (Roy *et al.*, 2022), thus undermining the contract of trust (Menvielle *et al.*, 2018) on which the customer relationship is based. Whether or not they are brand consumers (Perrin-Martineng and Hussant-Zébian, 2008), negative past experiences (Bryson *et al.*, 2021), symbolic incongruence (Zhang and Laroche, 2020), or ideological incompatibility (Hegner *et al.*, 2017) can lead people to experience negative feelings towards brands ranging from disappointment to hatred, and to adopt passive or active attitudes and behaviors (Bayarassou *et al.*, 2020) that may be harmful to brands. Brand hate is the most extreme negative emotion that consumers feel toward a brand (Bryson *et al.*, 2013; Dessart *et al.*, 2020; Fetscherin and KC, 2021). A consumer can go through different emotional states, from weak to strong, and it may evolve over time (Fetscherin, 2019). Yet with the democratization of Web 2.0 (Manceau, 2020), the massive use of social media has enabled the “anti-brand activities” (Kucuk, 2018, p. 566) that are its external expression to grow virally. This is all the more so as, unlike Web 1.0, which only allowed its users to consult content, the social Web also offers opportunities for creation, dissemination, and sharing (Poncier, 2009). Beyond the individual level, these new capabilities are also used collectively by consumers who come together in virtual communities. Originally created by brand fans wishing to share their passion or even love for a given brand (Bourdaa, 2016), a new type of community has recently appeared bringing together not Lovers but Haters, with hatred for a brand as their focal point (Awashi *et al.*, 2012). The main aim of these antibrand virtual communities is to bring together individuals to express their displeasure, anger, and hatred towards a given brand (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). For companies, taking an interest in consumers’ negative emotions is essential, particularly in terms of brand management (Walter *et al.*, 2023). Indeed, more and more companies are using brand management as a means of differentiation to gain a competitive advantage (Vieira and Sousa, 2020). And negative consumer emotions can have far-reaching consequences: complaints, avoidance, negative word of mouth, boycotts, etc. (Wu *et al.*, 2018). In this context, we asked ourselves about the relationships and/or the ties maintained between members, and what roles they play within the virtual anti-brand communities. In order to provide answers to this question, we have set out to: 1. analyze the content of exchanges (posts and comments) between members to understand the nature of their hatred, 2. determine the organizational and social structure in place to identify influence games and the strength of ties between members, and 3. define the intensity of members’ hatred and the behaviours corresponding to each level. To this end, we carried out a netnography within two French anti-brand online communities, one centered around the SNCF, a rail transport company, and the other bringing together detractors of SFR, a telecommunications operator.

From a theoretical point of view, while Dessart *et al.* (2020) were interested in the evolution of negative emotions and behavior of individuals leading to participation in collective action by joining virtual anti-brand communities, this research focuses on the ties between members of virtual anti-brand communities based on Granovetter’s theory of weak links (1973) and individual manifestations of their hatred in these communities (Fetscherin, 2019). It offers a categorization of the discourses and roles assumed by members of virtual anti-brand communities. Based on the components of hatred identified by Fetscherin (2019), our work has highlighted a graduated continuum of manifestations of this hatred, which is represented in the identification of the behaviors observed among members. Moreover, we have identified a new form of hate that we propose to call ‘Frozen Hatred’ and which is characterised in terms of behavioral outcomes by silent complaining.

For managers having to deal with hateful comments online, the questions broached here represent a real challenge. Indeed, with 60% of the French population actively using social networks¹, negative emotions, including hatred, can spread rapidly², especially since consumers are more likely to post negative comments following dissatisfaction or a negative customer experience (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2021) than positive ones (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). It therefore seems necessary for brands to monitor these communities in order to know and if possible to understand the reasons for hatred. In the first part, we present the theoretical framework of the research; then in the second part we detail the netnographic methodology implemented, before outlining the main findings of our study. Finally, theoretical contributions and managerial implications are offered in the light of the results.

¹ Les réseaux sociaux en France : les statistiques d’utilisation en 2023 (digimind.com)

² <https://www.ouest-france.fr/editiondusoir/2022-11-03/pourquoi-les-consommateurs-se-mettent-ils-a-hair-certaines-marques-2133c7e2-0f6d-441e-b936-36f6b7688557>

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From virtual communities to anti-brand communities

In the primary sense of the term, a community is a group of individuals who maintain reciprocal social relationships. In addition to this aspect, Weber et al. (2019) emphasize that community members enjoy a certain freedom of opinion and action. The arrival of the Web has offered communities a new arena for expression, enabling them not only to transcend the geographical and temporal boundaries of the physical world, but also to escape—at least partially—from state regulation by inventing a new social contract based on self-management (Barlow, 1996). While there are many different types of community (self-help, practice, brand), they all share structural characteristics, such as a common will to act, a shared interest, or the acceptance of common standards (Casaló *et al.*, 2008). The 'glue' of a community can therefore be a passion (Tolunay and Veloutsou, 2025), or indeed a shared feeling of hatred, for a brand. In fact, it is this very element that has contributed to the emergence of anti-brand virtual communities, which some refer to as Haters' virtual communities (Rodriguez and Buffaz, 2023). These thrive on Web 2.0 thanks to the ubiquity of User-Generated Content (UGC) (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008), which enables each Hater to express their negativity towards brands (Fournier and Avery, 2011), to share it (Awashi *et al.*, 2012), to interact with others with related sentiments, and to be socially approved as a member of the group (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009), to translate their ideological incompatibility with brands into negative engagement and activism in order to destroy the image and reputation of the hated brand (Buffaz, Perraud and Rodriguez, 2025). Consumers use UGC platforms as sites of interactive engagement focused on the hated brand (Dessart *et al.*, 2020). All these interactions gradually build up a toolbox or thesaurus (Wasko and Faraj, 2000) that then becomes useful to members in dealing with brand failures. Thanks to the Internet, anti-brands communities proliferate online in numbers, which is harmful for brands (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006). That's why it's important to understand the ties between members and to identify the manifestation of their hatred. Joining an anti-brand community is a way for consumers to assert their identity as brand haters (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Organization and member roles in anti-brand virtual communities

Like other types of virtual communities, anti-brand communities (Buffaz and Rodriguez, 2023) have an organizational structure, consisting of a hierarchy of influences and roles that are well defined (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). The allocation of roles, such as for example that of administrator, as well as the disposition of influences, can be historical—linked to the creation of the community—or depend on other criteria such as the social involvement of members, their investment (frequency of visits to the community, time spent) and intensity of participation, their behavior, and indeed their manner of participating (Raïes, 2009). Member participation is a decisive factor which determines the pattern by which a community may develop as well as its sustainability (Casaló *et al.*, 2008). A well-known principle in cyberculture proposes a pattern of participation with proportions that are commonly accepted and empirically verified, the "90–9–1" (Hill et al., 1992): ~90% "lurkers", ~9% active and ~1% fans. "Lurkers" are members who participate in the community passively, what some refer to as "Quiet membership" (Hammond, 2000). Their activity consists, on the one hand, in reading posted messages without responding to them, and, on the other, in obtaining functional and social benefits (Bateman *et al.*, 2011). Active members, and a fortiori fans, actively participate in the community by posting content and interacting with other members: this is known as "Communicative membership" (Hammond, 2000). To refine the portrait of members of virtual communities, particularly brand communities, researchers have proposed successive typologies that seek to categorize them on the basis of the nature and intensity of their participation in community activities (Appendix 1). As yet, however, there seems to be no analysis of the typology of members of an anti-brand virtual community.

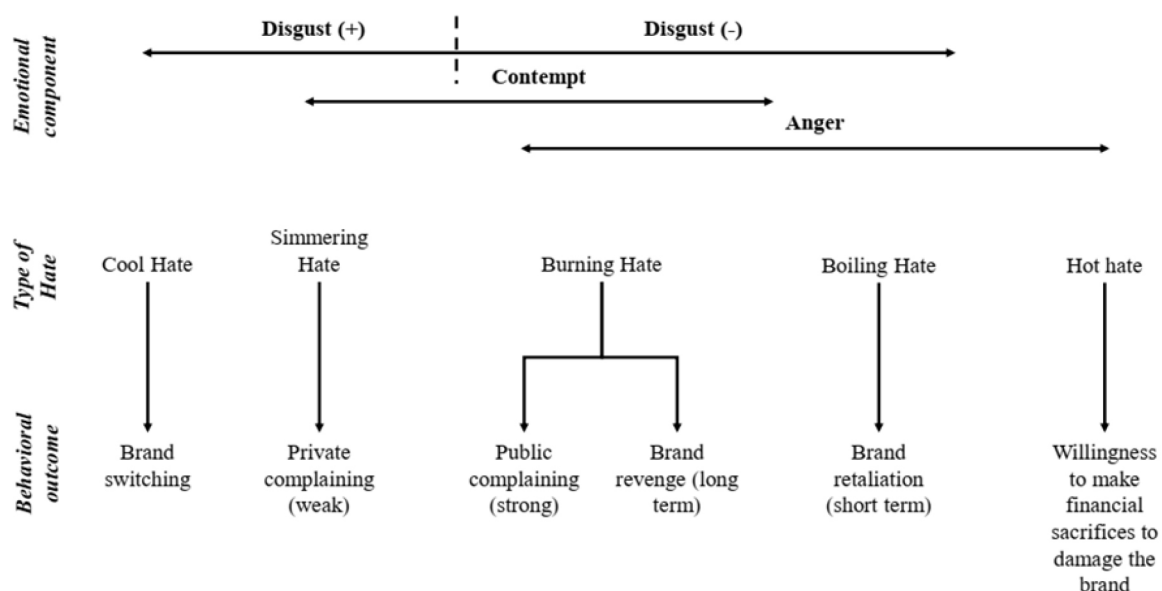
Granovetter's (1973) theory of weak links also studies the links between members of communities. This theory looks at the spread of information within communities and the strength of the ties (weak or strong) between members. The strength of the ties can be characterised by a combination of time spent together, emotional intensity, intimacy and reciprocity. In the context of anti-brand virtual communities, this theory could make it possible to characterise not only the nature of the content of the exchanges, but also the strength of the links between members, and could give us an idea of the roles and actions carried out by members within these communities.

A growing aversion to brands, to the point of hating them

Until now, research on brand relationships has focused mainly on positive consumer emotions (brand attachment, brand passion, brand commitment, brand loyalty, and brand love), and very rarely on negative consumer emotions towards

the brand (Curina *et al.*, 2021). Yet the latter are likely to have an impact on customer satisfaction, particularly when the service relationship fails or breaks down (Gonzalez-Gomez *et al.*, 2021). Thus, brands that fail to meet their customers' expectations can generate a variety of negative emotions such as frustration, regret, anger, or even hatred (Roy *et al.*, 2022). Hegner *et al.* (2017) highlighted three determinants at the root of customer hatred: (a) product-related determinants due to unmet expectations and poor performance; (b) consumer-related determinants due to incongruence between their own identity and the brand, which might be seen as too far removed from their own personality, or as inauthentic; and (c) context-related determinants due to inappropriate behaviors or actions on the part of brands. This concept of brand hatred has been defined in several ways, but to date no consensus has been reached (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2021). For Kucuk (2016), brand hatred corresponds to "consumers' detachment from a brand and its associations as a result of consumers' intense and deeply held negative emotions such as disgust, anger, contempt, devaluation and diminution", while for Bryson *et al.* (2013), it is "an intense negative emotional affect toward the brand", specified by Hegner *et al.* (2017) as "a more intense emotional response consumers have toward a brand than dislike". In psychology, there are two schools of thought on hatred: the first postulates that hatred is a single, simple emotion (Shaver *et al.*, 1987), while the other maintains that hatred is made up of multiple emotional components (Sternberg, 2003), making it more complex (Yadav and Chakrabarti, 2022). Concerning the second school, Sternberg (2003), in his Duplex theory of hate, stipulates the existence of an "actions" triangle and a "feelings" triangle, both of which are superimposable. Thus, each dimension of the "actions" triangle corresponds to an emotion: the denial of intimacy raises feelings of disgust, passion transforms into anger or fear, and finally commitment corresponds to contempt. Fetscherin (2019) has taken up Sternberg's elements by categorizing hatred into seven levels and associating the corresponding consumer behavior with each level (Cf. Figure 1).

Figure 1
Components of brand hatred according to Fetscherin (2019)



Thus, consumers' negative emotions towards brands, including hatred, can be of different intensities depending on the degree of passion felt (Fetscherin, 2019) and can also evolve over time (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018). Manifestations of hatred can be passive or active (Bayarassou *et al.*, 2020), and are likely to vary according to the intensity of the feelings experienced by the consumer. Bayarassou (2019) identifies two trajectories of hatred: avoidance and revenge, two possible manifestations of resistance among many others. Passive brand haters will engage in non-aggressive behavior such as brand avoidance (Bryson *et al.*, 2013), reducing or ceasing to patronize the brand, with the aim of escaping the brand

relationship (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Active brand hatred will take the form of negative consumer word-of-mouth (Kurtoglu *et al.*, 2021), private complaints to the consumer's social circle (friends, family, work colleagues) or public complaints (social networks), protests, the creation of an anti-brand community (Mednini and Hmida, 2023), or even retaliation, the consumer's aim being to take revenge on the brand through activism (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016). The publication of several literature reviews in recent years demonstrates the growing interest in this concept of hate (Kesse *et al.*, 2021; Yadav and Chakrabarti, 2022; Aziz and Rahman, 2022; Kumar *et al.*, 2023 and Mushtaq *et al.*, 2024).

This interest stems from the fact that the consumers who hate a brand are also the ones who cause it most harm (Do *et al.*, 2024). Anti-brand virtual communities can be perceived as being created solely to express and share highly negative judgments about a brand (Dessart *et al.*, 2016), with the ultimate aim of taking revenge on or harming the brand, thereby degrading its brand equity and reputation (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Kucuk, 2008; Romani *et al.*, 2015). A better analysis of the various dimensions of brand hatred could enable practitioners to devise preventive strategies or better manage such hatred, in order to limit potential customer loss (Aziz and Rahman, 2022).

In the light of this existing work, we felt it would be useful to expand our knowledge of the construction of relationships between members within anti-brand virtual communities, and to document the evolution of the roles occupied by these members within these same communities.

METHOD

Explanation of the choice of method

Netnography is a "qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study the culture and communities emerging through computer-mediated communications" (Kozinets, 2002, p. 62). Several advantages inherent in netnography influenced the decision to apply this methodology in the present case. Indeed, previous studies have chosen netnography to tackle fields similar to our own, namely that of online communities (Cova and Carrère, 2002). Moreover, as Kozinets (2002) points out, the observation of language data is the essential purpose of netnography, and this corresponds to the core aim of our research. Netnography also makes it possible to capture all the other data present in the virtual community under study, such as norms or traditions, which constitute both the context of the data and the socio-cultural foundations of the community under study. Netnography is also a suitable means to collect a large amount of high-quality data: in particular, thanks to the pseudonym-based anonymity conferred by the Internet (Bernard, 2004), community members' expressions are freer and more authentic and are moreover continuously accessible.

Compliance with methodological guidelines

First, the researchers engaged in an exercise of reflexive introspection (Gould, 2012), in order to bring out the structural elements of their subjectivity, i.e., their presuppositions and prior knowledge of the brands at the center of the fields to be observed (Renahy and Sorniguet, 2006), as well as the situational elements, i.e., the reactions the researchers would have when they arrived 'in the field' (Cova and Cova, 2002). As a matter of fact, the researchers were users of the SNCF but not of the RER E line, and were familiar with the SFR operator although they had never been customers. Subsequently, the researchers continued their preparation by defining the posture and behavior they would adopt in the field (Arborio and Fournier, 2005). Among the ethical principles defined by Kozinets (2002), the researchers took particular care to guarantee the confidentiality and privacy of the members of the communities observed (Chouk and Mani, 2016) by systematically anonymizing the data collected. However, it was not possible to comply with the usual practice of requesting permission to use verbatims published within the communities, due to the lack of response from a large number of community members. Finally, a methodological protocol was defined which provided for ex ante observation prior to community integration. This involved selecting the communities to be observed, carrying out ex ante observation, followed by community integration, floating observation, and then non-participant observation (Pothin *et al.*, 2022). The latter was motivated by the researchers' desire not to disturb the community environment, nor to bias the results by interacting with members of the communities observed (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry Jr, 2003).

Presentation and justification of the choice of communities observed

The two virtual communities studied were selected in three successive phases. First, the researchers identified two brands associated with French companies that could give rise to the creation of anti-brand virtual communities, due to

recurrent criticism from their customers³. These brands were also selected in view of the utilitarian nature of the products and services they offer—the utilitarian aspect being more open to criticism in the event of brand failure. The SNCF and SFR brands were chosen. The SNCF - which stands for Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français - is France's public railway company, created on 1st January 1938 by agreement between the State and the pre-existing railway companies. Even though the French market is beginning to open up to competition, the SNCF remains a virtual monopoly, transporting ~5 million passengers a day, including 3.5 million in the Île-de-France region thanks in particular to the RER. An integral part of France's cultural heritage, the SNCF is also hated by most French people, who criticise it for its high fares, poor quality of service and repeated strikes⁴. SFR - which stands for Société Française du Radiotéléphone - is a French telecommunications operator founded in 1987. Now a subsidiary of Patrick Drahi's Altice France group, SFR is historically the second of France's four national telephone operators. Like SNCF, SFR is hated by many French people. In December 2017, the association 60 millions de consommateurs awarded its Golden Cactus to SFR for having the worst consumer service in France (ineffective hotline, endless breakdowns, haphazard re-engagements, complicated cancellations, all seasoned with rate hikes passed in the middle of summer...). According to a survey by 60 million, 38% of SFR customers were dissatisfied with the service, compared with 12% at Orange and 7% at Free⁵. Thus, SNCF and SFR have as a common denominator that they both provide a service, but differ as regards their status in their respective markets—the former being a monopoly, the latter monopolistically competitive. Then, we had to select the appropriate social media host. Given that Facebook is the most widely used social network in France² and is a space with a reputation for hosting hateful and/or aggressive content⁶, the choice was made to search for two communities within this space. Finally, the researchers drew on the work of Buffaz and Isséki (2022) to build and employ a grid of qualitative (e.g., diversity of topics covered) and quantitative (e.g., number of members) criteria (Appendix 2), the two anti-brand virtual communities capable of generating the most reliable and valid results. The communities selected were two private French-speaking groups, “Les Rôleurs en ColRER E” and “Les mécontents de SFR”.

Data collection, coding and processing: a thematic qualitative analysis

Within the “Les Rôleurs en ColRER E” community, 1,008 online conversations were collected, of which 500 were posted in the period 11–20 October 2022, and 508 in the period between 30 November and December 19, 2022 (to avoid bias in conversations induced by SNCF strikes). For the “Les mécontents de SFR” community, 1,004 publications and comments were collected, posted between May 20 and June 27, 2023. The collection of language data was accompanied by any accompanying non-language data. These elements, such as emoticons, photos, and videos (Dooley, 2012), also convey meaning and emotions, and were therefore analyzed. We carried out a Textual Data Analysis (TDA), for which numerous tools and methods are now available (Fallery and Rodhain, 2007). The approach to analysis proposed by Bardin (2013) was followed in its entirety, providing for: a pre-analysis phase (floating reading, formulation of hypotheses and objectives, dimensions and directions of analysis), an in-depth data analysis phase, and a results processing and interpretation phase (statistical operations, synthesis and selection of results, inference and interpretation). For the pre-analysis phase, the floating reading of online conversations, i.e., publications and comments—which we refer to as “discourses”—made it possible to draw up a taxonomy of discourse composed of 4 macro-categories, 16 meso-categories, and 29 micro-categories (Table 1), and thus to categorize all conversations using the latter during the in-depth data analysis phase. This taxonomy forms our preliminary theoretical analysis grid, which we used as a coding guide for the qualitative analysis.

³ <https://www.lesechos.fr/industrie-services/automobile/remplace-par-sfr-la-sncf-nest-plus-derniere-du-classement-des-marques-1299350>

⁴ <https://www.quechoisir.org/billet-du-president-sncf-un-train-de-retard-sur-le-reseau-quotidien-n44608/>

⁵ <https://www.60millions-mag.com/2017/12/21/60-millions-decerne-ses-cactus-de-la-conso-2017-11504>

⁶ <https://www.nouvelobs.com/societe/20190428.OBS12212/sur-facebook-un-commentaire-sur-sept-est-haineux-ou-agressif.html>

Table 1
Taxonomy of discourses identified in the two anti-brand virtual communities studied
(Source: Authors own work)

Macro-category	Meso-category	Micro-category
Cognitive discourse	I look for information.	SNCF : I look for information on traffic, timetables, etc. SFR : I look for information on telecommunications equipment, Internet connections, after-sales service, etc.
	I ask for help.	I need to solve a complex problem (subscription, etc.).
	I ask for testimony.	I ask the other members if they have ever experienced a situation similar to mine.
Normative discourse	I share some information.	I share information on telecommunications equipment, Internet connection, after-sales service, etc.
	I offer to help.	I answer questions or help solve a complex problem (subscription, etc.).
	I share my experience.	I tell the other members how I've experienced such and such a situation.
Affective discourse	I contribute to the good atmosphere in the community.	I make jokes. I laugh.
	I express my feelings about the brand.	I criticize the brand.
		I express my weariness or hatred of the brand.
		I state my point of view.
	I take part in the debates.	I agree/disagree with what other members say.
		I feel understood.
		I feel supported.
	I express my feelings towards the community.	I have empathy for the members of the community.
Mixed speech	I share information and express my feelings about the brand.	I share information about telecommunication devices, Internet connection, after-sales service, etc., and I criticize the brand.
		I share information about telecommunications devices, Internet connection, after-sales service, etc., and express my weariness or hatred of the brand.
	I share information and contribute to the good atmosphere of the community.	I share information about telecommunication devices, Internet connection, after-sales service, etc., and make jokes.
		I share information about telecommunication devices, Internet connection, after-sales service, etc. and laugh.
	I share my experience and express my feelings about the brand.	I tell other members how I've experienced such and such a situation, and I criticize the brand.
		I tell other members how I've experienced such and such a situation, and express my weariness or hatred of the brand.
	I offer help and express my feelings about the brand.	I answer questions or help solve a complex problem (subscription, etc.) and criticize the brand.
		I answer questions or help solve a complex problem (subscription, etc.) and express my weariness or hatred of the brand.
	I look for information and express my feelings about the brand.	SNCF : I look for information on traffic, schedules, etc., and I criticize the brand. SFR : I look for information on telecommunications devices, Internet connection, after-sales service, etc., and I criticize the brand.
		SNCF : I look for information on traffic, schedules, etc., and express my weariness or hatred of the brand. SFR : I look for information on telecommunications devices, Internet connection, after-sales service, etc., and I express my weariness or hatred of the brand.
	I take part in debates and express my feelings about the brand.	I express my point of view and criticize the brand.
		I state my point of view and express my weariness or hatred of the brand. I agree/disagree with what other members say and I criticize the brand.
		I agree/disagree with other members' comments and express my weariness or hatred of the brand.

Coding was carried out twice—by each researcher independently—before being pooled to reach a consensus, and was also the subject of a combination of an inductive and deductive approach, allowing for a back-and-forth between the data collected and successive interpretations. Finally, to process and interpret the results, the four bodies of texts, corresponding to the four discourse types, were downloaded into the IRaMuTeQ software (Marghobi, 2019). These were processed through a top-down classification of text segments (“Reinert method”), bringing out thematic nodes. This operation was carried out twice, once for each community studied. Descriptive statistics of the coded data set were also entered into an Excel spreadsheet, in order to assess the frequency and prevalence of each category and sub-category of discourse within the two anti-brand virtual communities studied.

Study of the lexical field of hate

To confirm our choice of communities and ensure that they were indeed anti-brand communities comprising disgruntled customers and Haters, we set out to reconstitute the lexical field of hatred from the collected verbatims. A lexical field can be defined as “a set of lexical units covering an area of meaning”⁷. To do this, we carried out a floating reading of the verbatims, to check that the emotional components of brand hatred identified by Yadav and Chakrabarti (2022) were indeed present in our verbatims. We then listed the semantic cues characteristic of online hate speech, namely: “the use of capital letters and/or exclamation marks, the use of suspension points, the use of emoticons (e.g. angry face)” (Bailly and Moïse, 2023).

⁷ LEXICAL : Définition de LEXICAL (cnrtl.fr)

RESULTS

Different discourses reveal a chromatic spectrum of hatred that is not identical from one community to another

In order to ascertain the anti-brand nature of the communities studied, we carried out a semantic analysis of the verbatims collected. This enabled us to identify some of the emotional components of hatred listed by Yadav and Chakrabarti (2022). Combined with the semantic indices collected, we can confirm that we are dealing with hatred felt by members, and consequently with anti-brand virtual communities. Indeed, we can see in the posts and comments the presence of numerous negative emoticons that resemble graduated forms of hatred (exhaling smiley, angry, red-faced, swearing, crying, desperate, vomiting, etc.). What's more, when positive emoticons, smileys, or pictograms appear (Halté, 2016), they are generally used in an ironic sense. Punctuation is used in an exaggerated way, so as to accentuate the discourse: *"It's clear, it's an obstacle course!!! and a new test every day!!! I wonder what we can win!!! (+2 smiley angry)"*, *"common sense???? Naaaaaannnn"* (S.H. – no. 53.1)⁸. The most prevalent emotional components are anger (*"I'm sick of it too!!!"* – C.C. no. 48.4)⁹, aversion (*"They cancel the trains, and then they want to increase the Navigo pass! (+2 angry red smiley faces) Every day it's shit!"* – M.L. no. 47)¹⁰, contempt (*"This operator is deplorable after all, it's normal, it's a Mauritian group that runs this company, and most of them don't speak French very well, so how do you expect them to deal with customer problems"* – J-C. I. no. 48.11)¹¹, indignation (*"But it's too much! Meeting at 11am this morning at Daumesnil, leaving Le Raincy at 8.30am to make sure I wouldn't be in the shit ... it's a real shame it's come to this"* – C.C. no. 71.8)¹², frustration (*"It's better to laugh at this sh...t line so as not to go crazy. You can never rely on the RER or on the timetables advertised. The management of this line, which resembles third-world transport, is frankly lamentable..."* – A.S. no. 71.6)¹³, and sometimes fear (*"That's really my drama ... my worry is the imminent threat of the bailiff and I have no intention of paying for their vacations!! I have no more hours to waste in the 4 digits"* – K.F. no. 52.5)¹⁴. We note, however, the absence of the following components: humiliation and shame.

Analysis of the posts and comments of the "Les Râleurs en CoIRER E" community and the "Les mécontents de SFR" community using the IRaMuTeQ and Excel tools revealed four dimensions characterizing the nature of the exchanges: a normative dimension referring to members' altruistic and self-help behaviors; a cognitive dimension expressed through the group's solicitation to meet a need; an affective dimension comprising the expression of members' feelings and emotions; and a mixed dimension relating to discourses mixing normative and affective tones. However, the distribution of these dimensions diverges between the two communities observed. While the cognitive dimension remains low and the mixed dimension average in both communities, we note that the most common discourse among "Les Râleurs en CoIRER E" is affective (48%), while the normative discourse (43%) is the most frequent among "Les mécontents de SFR". In terms of meso-categories of discourse, we note that verbatims similar to "I take part in debates" (20%), "I contribute to the good community atmosphere" (13%), and "I share information" (19%) are in the majority among "Les Râleurs en CoIRER E", while verbatims of the type "I offer help" (22%) and "I take part in debates" (17%) are the most represented among "Les mécontents de SFR".

These results seem to demonstrate the influence not only of the community's organizational structure, but also of the brand's economic situation, on the way hate is expressed. In the case of "Les Râleurs en CoIRER E", the SNCF has a monopoly on the RER E line, and its users often have no choice but to subscribe to the company's offer and suffer its service failures. As a result, members of this rather democratic community tend to use this forum as a cathartic outlet, grumbling in silence, even as they help each other by sharing information. The "Les mécontents de SFR" group, on the other hand, revolves around a telecoms company in monopolistic competition. As a result, its members express hatred of the brand in a way that is less recurrent and more violent than in the other community. As SFR's products and services are complex, members give precedence to mutual support over hatred.

⁸ *"C'est clair, c'est le parcours du combattant !!! et une nouvelle épreuve chaque jour !!! Je me demande bien ce que l'on peut gagner !!! (+2 smiley colère)"*, *"du bon sens chez eux ???? Naaaaaannnn"*.

⁹ *"moi aussi j'en ai PLUS QUE MARRE!!!"*

¹⁰ *"Ça supprime les trains, et après ça veut augmenter le pass navigo! (+2 smiley rouge de colère) Tous les jours c'est la merde !"*

¹¹ *"Cette opérateur est déplorable après c'est normal c'est un groupe Mauricien qui gère cette entreprise la plupart ont dû mal en langue française comment voulez vous ils arrivent à régler les problème des clients"*.

¹² *"Mais c'est trop ça!! Rdv à 11h ce matin a Daumesnil partie du Raincy à 8h30 pour être sûre de ne pas être emmerder .. c'est grave d'en arriver a ça quand même"*.

¹³ *"Mieux vaut en rire effectivement de cette ligne de m...de pour ne pas devenir dingue. On ne peut jamais compter sur ce RER et sur les horaires annoncés. Gestion franchement lamentable de cette ligne qui ressemble à des transports du tiers-monde..."*.

¹⁴ *"Effectivement c'est bien mon drame .. mon souci la menace imminente à l'huissier et je n'ai pas l'intention de payer pour leurs vacances !! je n'ai plus d'heures à perdre aux 4 chiffres"*.

A different organizational and social structure from one community to another, but a common goal: to revile the brand

The “Les Râleurs en ColRER E” community and the “Les mécontents de SFR” community share the same goal: to vilify the brand. However, observation of the language and non-language data shows that these acts of hatred are not organized and perpetrated in exactly the same ways in each group. In the “Les Râleurs en ColRER E” community, all members hate the SNCF, but in a desperate and tragic way, since, as Albert Camus explains in his essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), every day they have to face up to the disruptions affecting their transport line, the RER E, all over again. Although these disruptions seem absurd to them, they still have to accept them, and so they organize themselves into a community to mitigate them by helping each other. In the “Les mécontents de SFR” community, apart from a very few dissenting voices, all members agree in making SFR a scapegoat, as described by anthropologist and philosopher René Girard in his essay *La Violence et le Sacré* (1972), in the sense that the operator is held responsible for all their setbacks and must pay for them. This visceral hatred of SFR, marked by the use of many vulgar words, is the glue that holds the community together. In terms of community participation, the “Les Râleurs en ColRER E” community is more mobilized than “Les mécontents de SFR”: 220 members of the 2,168 members of the former community spoke out against the brand in the verbatims recorded, equivalent to 10% of all members, and 31 of them (1% of the total) did so at least 10 times. Thus the “90–9–1” rule for community participation has been verified. On the other hand, in the “Les mécontents de SFR”, only 249 of the 7,850 members speak out against the brand, representing just 3% of the total, and only 18 do so more than 10 times. Haters of the SFR brand are thus much quieter and more passive than those of the SNCF brand. There are also differences in terms of community management. The “Les Râleurs en ColRER E” community seems more balanced and democratic than the “Les mécontents de SFR” community. The former is managed by 3 administrators and 1 moderator who are the main contributors, supported by a dozen or so very active members. The second, on the other hand, is run by 1 administrator who is also the community moderator. She shares her power with only one other member, designated as a group specialist, both of whom converse regularly and influence the mood of the community. In the “Les mécontents de SFR” community there is a kind of one-party rule, in the sense that dissenting voices promoting SFR are systematically disavowed and expelled from the community by the administrator. Conversely, in the “Les Râleurs en ColRER E” community, impromptu debates sometimes take place, and petitions are launched in an attempt to change the situation of users. This may also explain why community participation is lower in the “Les mécontents de SFR” community: Haters need to express themselves; if they are repressed or crushed by the participation of a few, their commitment against the brand diminishes. As for the roles occupied by community members, we note a dichotomy between official and unofficial roles that is common to both communities observed (Cf. Table 2). Official roles are those that are de facto assigned or obtained by community participants, i.e., administrator, moderator, group specialist, and member. These roles grant rights to their actors, and can be recognized by mentions attached to profiles and/or by pictograms. On the other hand, participants can also create unofficial roles, which give them a special place in the community structure and a definite influence on the direction taken by the community. For example, at “Les Râleurs en ColRER E”, a trade unionist regularly intervenes to defend the SNCF brand and railway workers when he feels that the hatred expressed by the community goes beyond the brand’s shortcomings in service delivery. These roles, particularly unofficial ones, could thus be a key variable determining the character of the hatred expressed against the brand, whether in terms of its vigor or its manifestations. Drawing on the work of Buffaz and Rodriguez (2023), it seems that silent grumbling is more than a manifestation of hatred, it is a full-fledged role in anti-brand communities.

Table 2

Roles and status within the two anti-brand virtual communities observed (Source: Authors)

Role status	Role	Description (rights, duties, powers, etc.)	« Les Râleurs en ColRER E » community	« Les mécontents de SFR » community
Official	Administrator	Role obtained from the outset by the community creator or assigned by him to other members. Gives full community management rights and legitimate authority.	3 administrators	1 female administrator
Official	Moderator	Role obtained by the community creator or assigned by him to other members. Gives the right to moderate comments made by members, as well as legitimate authority.	1 moderator	1 female moderator, who is also the female administrator
Official	Group specialist	Role conferred by community administrators. Denotes expertise in the subjects dealt with within the community, and <i>de facto</i> legitimate authority.	2 group specialists, who are administrators	1 group specialist
Official	Member	Basic role for all participants in the virtual community. Gives the right to create, comment, link and share publications.	2,168 members, including 220 who expressed themselves through the 1,000 verbatims collected	7,850 members, including 249 who express themselves through the 1,000 verbatims collected
Informal	Brand critic	Informal role, acquired and used by members of the virtual community, users/customers of the brand. Allows them to criticize the brand, but also to request and offer information and support.	The vast majority of members who speak out criticize the brand. The speeches are not neutral, but full of hatred.	
Informal	Brand counter-critic	Informal role, acquired and used by members of the virtual community, brand staff. It's as much about defending the brand as it is about requesting and offering information and support.	Presence of at least 1 SNCF trade unionist trying to set the record straight about the company. Presence of several drivers, appreciated by the brand's critical members.	Several SFR technicians present to explain the services. Defense of the brand by a member (who doesn't understand the hatred of the brand), who is booed by the administrator and the group's specialist.
Informal	Relay	Informal role, acquired and used by members of the virtual community, politicians. Used to showcase the political actions taken to help the brand's users/customers.	The mayor of a commune served by the RER E explains his actions to the SNCF, but is booed by the community.	No relay observed.
Informal	Silent complainer	Informal role, acquired and used by members of the virtual community, passive members. Allows them to see what active members publish and to support them in silence.	They represent a significant proportion of the communities studied. Their support is generally limited to emotions translated by reactions added to publications of haters.	

From frozen hatred to hot hatred: a graduated continuum of manifestations

As indicated above, members of anti-brand virtual communities may become involved because they are consumers of these brands and have had a negative past experience with them (Bryson *et al.*, 2021), or because they reject the values upheld by these brands, even if they are not consumers (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Perrin-Martinénq and Hussant-Zébian, 2008). These community engagement factors appear to be as much vectors of hatred as they are antecedents of the self-help behaviors, potentially harmful to brands, observed within the anti-brand virtual communities studied. Thus, the hatred observed among the members of these anti-brand virtual communities varies in intensity and can be expressed in different ways. Using Fetscherin's (2019) components of hatred, we were able to define a continuum of manifestations of hatred by members of the anti-brand virtual communities studied (Cf. Table 3). Our analysis also reveals a level of hatred. This is a frozen hatred that is reflected in the role played by members of the community who grumble in silence. Beyond the 'temperature' of the hatred to which they are linked, the nature of these manifestations also varies according, on the one hand, to the type of goods and services marketed by the brand, and, on the other, to the irritability of the community (Cf. *supra*). For example, hot hatred, which Fetscherin (2019) describes as a willingness to make financial sacrifices in order to damage the brand, can take the form of refusing to pay one's fare for Haters in the "Les Râleurs en ColRER E" community, which could result in a simple fine for the offender, while for Haters in the "Les mécontents de SFR" community it could take the form of a refusal to pay bills, which could lead to far more serious consequences for delinquent customers facing a bailiff. Thus, because of its more radical hatred, the "Les mécontents de SFR" community seems to generate more violent and damaging behavior towards the SFR brand than the "Râleurs en ColRER E" community does towards the SNCF brand.

Table 3

Manifestations of hatred within the two anti-brand virtual communities observed
(from Fetscherin, 2019; Source: Authors own work)

Type of hate	Frozen hate	Cool hate	Simmering hate	Burning hate	Boiling hate	Hot hate
Behavioral outcome	Silent complaining	Brand switching	Private complaining	Public complaining or Brand revenge	Brand retaliation	Willingness to make financial sacrifices to damage the brand
SNCF manifestation	Membership of the community, but without active participation	Not applicable due to SNCF monopoly. Except in exceptional cases: using the car to be on time for a medical appointment, for example.	Active participation in the community	Complaints to the Mayor of one of the towns served by the line Letter to SNCF management Relay and sign petition	Not applicable	Refusal to pay their fares, even if it means risking a fine
SFR manifestation	Membership of the community, but without active participation	Operator switching	Active participation in the community	Sending registered letters with acknowledgement of receipt Use of consumer rights associations	Filing a complaint	Refuse to pay their bills and find themselves facing a bailiff.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical contributions

This research makes several theoretical contributions related to the study of brand hatred—still a rather novel concept but one that is gaining momentum, since it is one of the most studied negative emotions in the consumer/brand relationship (Khatoon and Rehman, 2021)—and anti-brand virtual communities. In our opinion, the main theoretical contributions lie, on the one hand, in the typology of manifestations of hatred within communities (Table 3), but also in the categorisation of publications according to four dimensions: affective, cognitive, normative and mixed. Firstly, our work offers a categorization (affective, normative, mixed, and to a lesser extent cognitive) of posts and comments within two anti-brand virtual communities. The predominance of one type of discourse over another seems to determine the orientation of hatred in terms of members' actions and passive manifestations. While avoidance, change, separation, contempt, and boycott are already documented in the literature as passive manifestations of hatred (Yadav and Chakrabarti, 2022), this research tends to complete this bestiary with silent grumbling and the desire to help each other beyond merely hating. Our work makes it possible to enrich the model proposed by Fetscherin (2019) with the addition of a new level of hatred, 'frozen hate', which is reflected in this manifestation: the fact of silently grumbling. What is more, the identification of a lexical field of hate in the observed communities proves that the hateful nature is expressed and recognized above all through linguistic—and also non-linguistic—semiology. Secondly, with regard to organizational structure, anti-brand virtual communities, like other types of virtual communities, present a well-defined hierarchy of influences and roles. Indeed, our work seems to demonstrate that, beyond the unifying barycentre that is brand hatred, anti-brand communities are not all organized in the same way, and that this structure influences the preponderance, nature, intensity, and manner of expression of hatred. Our study also revealed that the organisational dynamics of anti-brand communities are more complex than they appear: on the one hand, some members tend to hold nuanced or even positive hate speeches towards the brand, and on the other hand, the verbal expression of hatred seems to be a necessary but insufficient condition for large-scale action against the brand. The analysis carried out has enabled us to define a typology of anti-brand virtual community members, a typology which has hitherto been lacking in the literature. Moreover, few studies have been devoted to understanding the direct effects of

brand hatred on consumer behavior (Walther, 2022). Our work, based on the components of hatred identified by Fetscherin (2019), has highlighted a graduated continuum of manifestations of this hatred, which is represented in the identification of the behaviors observed among members of the anti-brand virtual communities studied. Drawing on Granovetter's (1973) theory of weak ties, it appears that the ties between members of the SNCF community are rather strong because of the daily renewal of hatred (since train cancellations and delays occur every day), whereas the ties between members of the SFR community are rather weak because of isolated and individual problems or incidents (since an Internet box problem can affect one person at a time). Finally, it appears that the benefits sought by participants in anti-brand virtual communities are similar to those of members of communities of Lovers of the same brands, namely information, social relations, help, and visibility (Raïes, 2006).

Managerial benefits

Several recommendations can be made for brands that arouse the ire and even hatred of some of their customers. It is now recognized that brand hatred grows online through websites and social media groups, and can be expressed instantaneously and virally (Kucuk, 2019), leading to consumer empowerment in the customer relationship (Kucuk, 2014), and giving anti-brand communities a strong potential to cause a nuisance (Kucuk, 2008). A brand can "lose numerous existing customers and alienate innumerable potential customers, which can result in millions of dollars of damage to a brand" (Kähr *et al.*, 2016, p.25). The marketing strategy to adopt with regard to anti-brand virtual communities could be twofold, irrespective of the status of the company (SME, MSC, MNF). On the one hand, an offensive strategy could be implemented with the aim of stifling hatred. This would involve community management when the brand is attacked directly on its networks, with responses that oscillate between *mea culpa*—through "hate-acknowledging advertising"¹⁵—humor, and entering into exchanges with the haters, for example offering them the chance to modify their posts for the better in exchange for free products or services¹⁶. This would also involve lighting 'counter-fires' by joining existing Lovers' communities, or building new ones if they do not exist, in order to create a network of brand ambassadors and offer customers the chance to contribute to improving the brand's products and services (brainstorming workshops, co-creation, etc.). From this perspective, haters' comments can be a source of improvement or optimization for brands' products or services, as part of a co-construction process (Cova & Dalli, 2009). On the other hand, a defensive RICE (Research, Integrate, Understand, Exchange) strategy could also be carried out, aimed at identifying anti-brand virtual communities, monitoring their activity, understanding their criticisms, and implementing remedial actions and/or dialogue with the most virulent Haters in an attempt to defuse their hatred—if at all possible. Given that the key to successful brand management is in-depth knowledge of consumers, brands have every interest in identifying the reasons behind their negative emotions, so as not to lose current and/or potential customers (Haase *et al.*, 2022).

We propose below to detail the stages of a defensive marketing strategy. Detecting anti-brand virtual communities should be the starting point for any marketing-communication strategy aimed at countering their negative influence. Above all, we need to distinguish between the isolated whistle-blower and the structured, organized community. A whistle-blower is an isolated individual who spontaneously publishes a hateful comment about a brand, which, through the viral effect (the 'hashtag' on X), will temporarily rally other disgruntled individuals. This is more of a temporary crisis. Anti-brand virtual communities, on the other hand, may be less visible, but are more enduring, sustaining an ongoing fire that does lasting damage to brands. Anti-brand virtual communities can be identified by using keywords associated with the brand name in the social media search bar. In this way, anti-brand groups and communities can be brought to light. Following this identification, it would be important to observe these communities to assess their level of danger to the brand, which would depend on the number of members, the number of publications, and the nature of the haters' intentions and activities. Communities deemed to be non-dangerous would not be investigated, whereas the investigation of communities deemed dangerous would involve integrating into these communities, then understanding their organization, how they function, and the criticisms they level at the brand. Criticism could be understood in a number of ways: by simply reading the publications, by public or private exchanges with the authors of posts, or by semi-directive interviews. The challenge for a brand that is being subject to vehement criticism is to decide whether or not to reveal itself to its Haters within the community. If it does reveal itself—and this may indeed be necessary in order to conduct interviews—it runs the risk of being expelled and losing all marketing intelligence on these communities. Once the reviews have been collected and understood, both Haters and their critiques can be classified into typologies, in other words, segmented, targeted, and positioned. The least virulent Haters could potentially be converted into neutral customers or even brand promoters. The most realistic and constructive criticisms should be remedied by the brand.

¹⁵ <https://theconversation.com/quest-ce-qui-conduit-le-consommateur-a-ha-r-certaines-marques-193232>

¹⁶ <https://creapills.com/funky-veggie-haters-20231129>

More generally, anti-brand virtual communities seem, sometimes despite themselves, to achieve their objective of forcing brands to improve their quality/price ratio by provoking legislative changes. Indeed, the members of these communities are comparable to whistleblowers who use the virality of social networks to call on public authorities and put pressure on brands. In France, the law of March 21, 2022 strengthens the protection of whistleblowers, enshrined in the so-called "Sapin 2" law of 2016¹⁷. It transposes a European directive of October 23, 2019 and goes even further. Thus, faced with consumers suffering less from information asymmetry than before the Internet and benefiting from a protective legal status, brands have no other choice but to take their demands into account, otherwise at the risk of seeing their reputation permanently damaged. For example, by organizing themselves within an anti-brand community on Facebook called "Les Usagers du Train Clermont-Paris" and by summoning the press, users of this stricken line managed to make themselves heard by the French state which forced the SNCF to invest massively to renovate the railway line¹⁸. In addition, to respond among other things to the discontent of users, the French State has also decided to partially end the monopoly situation of the SNCF.

Limitations

Despite its many contributions to the literature, this research project is not without limitations. The first limitation is one that is inherent to all netnographic research, and concerns its exploratory nature. As such, further studies are required to confirm, and possibly adjust, the initial results obtained. New language data from time periods other than those chosen for this study could be collected, in order to obtain more extensive and therefore theoretically more reliable text corpora, and to dispel any biases due to the respective contexts of the companies studied, SNCF and SFR. The second limitation, in line with the previous one, is that we need also to explore other communities of Haters to find new points of comparison, such as a community of Haters centered around a public company that is also a monopoly, such as RATP, or centered around other service sectors such as air transport or insurance. We might also ask whether the results we found could be applied to less utilitarian products, such as luxury goods or ready-to-wear brands. The third limitation of this research is linked to the semiological analysis of the non-language data collected within the two communities observed, which can always be improved. The visible signs, known as "surface" signs, were analyzed by the authors of this research; the invisible or "latent" signs, however, were not. Yet the meaning of these elements can be likened to an iceberg, whose submerged side needs to be analyzed using appropriate tools, so as to understand the broader narrative structure and associated values which would then influence our interpretations.

Further Research

Several avenues of further research could be explored. Firstly, the results obtained should be triangulated in order that they can be generalized. This could be done through two non-exclusive prisms: by changing the site where the field is hosted online, and by changing the method of data collection. It might also be interesting to study some other SNCF and SFR anti-brand communities on at least one social network other than Facebook. Data collection, meanwhile, could be modified by adopting other qualitative forms such as semi-directive interviews with members of online communities or with SNCF users and SFR customers in situ, i.e., in stations and stores during field visits. We could also join and observe online communities that are "false twins" of the SNCF and SFR anti-brand communities, namely communities of Lovers, to verify our results in the light of Granovetter's theory of weak links (1973). Our results seem to show that hatred is a factor in engagement and community structuring, as well as an engine of servuction, encouraging customers to carry out elements of the SNCF and SFR service provision themselves, to make up for their shortcomings. It would therefore be interesting to know whether brand love is as engaging, structuring, and creative as brand hate, in line with the work of Cova & Dall'i (2009).

¹⁷ <https://www.vie-publique.fr/loi/282472-loi-21-mars-2022-waserman-protection-des-lanceurs-dalerte>

¹⁸ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/conjoncture/ligne-paris-clermont-comment-la-sncf-et-le-gouvernement-veulent-limiter-les-innombrables-retards-20240223>

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1.

Typologies of virtual community members identified in the literature

Authors and years	Member types	Authors and years	Member types
Rheingold (1993), Brown <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Contributors	Ozbülük and Dursun (2017)	Learners
	Passives		Pragmatics
Kozinets (1999)	Devotees		Activists
	Insiders		Opinion Leaders
	Tourists		Evangelists
	Minglers	Veloutsou and Black (2020)	Talent Scouts
Kim (2000)	Visitors		Greeters
	Novices		Catalysts
	Regulars		Guides
	Leaders		Hosts
	Elders		Accountants
Preece (2000)	Moderators		Mentors
	Mediators		Partners
	Commentators		Historians & Storytellers
	Provocateurs		Heroes and Hosts
	Participants		Professional working
Äkkinen (2005)	Passives		Consumers
	The onlookers		Strategists
	The simple users		Facilities Managers
	users		Boundary spanners
De Valck <i>et al.</i> (2009)	The leader users		Brand Liaison
	The functionalists	Buffaz and Rodriguez (2023)	Ambassadors
	The opportunists		Administrator
	The hobbyists		Moderator
	The informationalists		Group specialist
	The conversationalists		Member
	The key members		Brand critic
Sonnenbichler (2010)	Visitors		Brand counter-critic
	Novices		Relay
	Actives		
	Leaders		
	Passives		
	Trolls		
Portilla et Perez-Vega (2016)	The feeling seekers		
	The brand-lovers		
	The serial shares		
	The thinkers		
	The pragmatics		
	The social		

Appendix 2.

Selection criteria for the two anti-brand virtual communities studied (Source: Authors own work)

Macroscopic criteria	
Criterion n°1	French-speaking virtual community
Criterion n°2	Community centered around the SNCF or SFR brand
Criterion n°3	Community of Haters
Criterion n°4	Openness of the virtual community
Mesoscopic criteria	
Criterion n°5	Number of virtual community members
Criterion n°6	Number of daily publications on the virtual community
Microscopic criteria	
Criterion n°7	Population composed solely of users/customers in the virtual community
Criterion n°8	Level of variety of topics discussed in the virtual community

Facial expressions in conversational AI: the hot trend that boosts empathy but flops on trust

Abstract :

Dynamic facial expressions in AI conversational agents are a rising trend, enhancing emotional engagement and user satisfaction by making interactions feel more personal and engaging. An experimental design comparing two chatbots—one with dynamic expressions and one without—showed that while expressions enhance emotional connection, they fall short in improving trust or advice quality. Absence of expressions fits contexts requiring objectivity and transparency. These findings stress the growing importance of a context-sensitive design in conversational AI, where emotional cues are carefully balanced to match user expectations.

Key words: *Conversational AI, emotional engagement, social presence, trust in AI, nonverbal cues*

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INTRODUCTION

Conversational AI tools, such as ChatGPT and other chatbots, have become central to customer service, digital marketing, and brand engagement by simulating human behavior and providing constant accessibility (Mariani et al. 2023). Most systems lack nonverbal cues, despite their proven role in emotional engagement, trust, and satisfaction (Sagliano et al. 2022).

A recent trend in conversational AI design involves integrating dynamic facial expressions into chatbots to enhance user experiences further. These expressions let chatbots react visually to conversational tone, such as showing compassion in sensitive situations (Duan et al. 2018; Dong et al. 2023). Such nonverbal cues aim to humanize digital interactions, aligning with social presence theory (Biocca et al. 2003) and social response theory (Nass & Moon 2000), which suggest users often apply human social norms to anthropomorphic technologies.

AI-driven services offer scalability and efficiency which is convenient for companies, although it remains uncertain whether they can fully replicate the emotional intelligence and adaptability of human agents over time. Studies suggest that AI's lack of genuine empathy may limit its capacity to create lasting customer satisfaction and trust in high-contact services such as healthcare and hospitality (Fakhimi et al. 2023).

Although AI systems are convenient for companies, not all users are equally comfortable or satisfied. Perceived empathy often falls short compared to human agents, especially in emotionally charged contexts (Rostami & Navabinejad 2023 ; Brunswicker et al. 2024).

However, while dynamic facial expressions may improve emotional closeness and enhance social presence, their influence on trust, transparency, and objectivity remains poorly understood. Emotional cues could foster deeper engagement but also introduce ethical risks, such as perceived emotional manipulation or reduced neutrality, particularly in contexts demanding professional detachment like healthcare or financial advising (Floridi & Cowls 2019; Balasubramaniam et al. 2023).

To our knowledge, no empirical research has yet systematically explored the impact of dynamic facial expressions on user perceptions of trust, transparency, and emotional engagement in conversational AI. This gap may stem from the recent technological advancements that now allow for more sophisticated emotional expressiveness. To address this, the present study investigates three key questions:

- How do dynamic facial expressions influence emotional engagement in AI interactions?
- What impact do they have on trust, ethical perception, and transparency?
- What balance between emotional connection and professional neutrality should brands adopt when designing conversational AI systems?

By empirically exploring these dimensions, this study contributes both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for designing emotionally expressive AI conversational agents, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive design where emotional cues are strategically deployed to balance engagement and credibility (Jin 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social presence and human-AI interactions

Social presence theory posits that human-like traits in artificial agents increase perceived intimacy and realism during interaction, thereby enhancing user engagement and satisfaction (Biocca et al. 2003). These effects are amplified when agents display anthropomorphic features—such as facial expressions, empathetic reactions, or gaze behaviors—that fulfill users' need for emotional connection (Odhiambo 2024). Recent work has refined the notion of social presence, conceptualizing it as a multidimensional construct encompassing empathy, affability, responsiveness, communication versatility, and competence. These dimensions interact to shape users' perception of human-likeness in AI and are central to trust and engagement outcomes (Liao et al. 2024). Integrating this multidimensional view provides a more nuanced framework for analyzing emotional closeness and perceived realism in human-AI interaction.

Empirical studies confirm that expressive conversational agents enhance relational closeness and improve user experiences in education and customer service (Lindgren et al. 2024; Adam et al. 2021). Complementarily, social response theory (Nass & Moon 2000) explains users' tendency to apply human social scripts to machines when they exhibit emotionally congruent behaviors, reinforcing the illusion of meaningful interaction.

Perceived "mind" attribution plays a central role in this dynamic. Lee et al. (2020) show that subtle social cues—such as emotionally synchronized verbal or visual signals—increase users' sense of co-presence, emotional closeness,

and reuse intentions. Seeger et al. (2021) stress that such cues, when consistent with the interactional context, reinforce affective engagement and interaction credibility. Similarly, Van Pinxteren et al. (2020) demonstrate that tone, style, and facial expressiveness shape trust and perceived empathy.

In this framework, facial expressions function as key nonverbal signals, simulating emotional responsiveness and relational warmth. They amplify users' perception of social presence and personal connection. Virtual features like facial identity cues also impact user attitudes by triggering identity-related effects (Gerlich 2023), thereby reinforcing the emotional salience of the interaction. The perceived authenticity of these emotional signals remains a challenge. While users often respond positively to empathetic expressions, many remain aware of their artificiality, which can evoke ambivalence and weaken engagement over time (Rostami & Navabinejad 2023). This perception gap between apparent and actual empathy becomes particularly salient in sensitive domains such as health or counseling.

However, anthropomorphic design introduces risks. Najafi & Mohammadi (2024) warn that poorly timed or exaggerated cues can disrupt the illusion of authenticity, decreasing user trust. Pelau et al. (2021) further argue that overexposure to emotionally intelligent systems may reduce human empathy and distort identity development.

From a cognitive perspective, recent research shows that anthropomorphized AI systems can subtly influence user behavior and decision-making, increasing emotional dependency and reducing perceived autonomy (Xu et al. 2025). This suggests that emotional closeness may come at the cost of independent reasoning, particularly when cues simulate relational intimacy.

Therefore, we propose the following:

- H1a.** Dynamic facial expressions in AI agents enhance emotional closeness.
- H1b.** Dynamic facial expressions in AI agents increase user satisfaction.
- H1c.** Dynamic facial expressions in AI agents reduce perceived autonomy.

Nonverbal cues, empathy, and engagement

Nonverbal signals—especially facial expressions, gaze, and subtle gestures—are fundamental in social communication. In human–AI interactions, these cues provide emotional framing and interpretive depth, transforming neutral or transactional dialogues into more meaningful exchanges (Zhang et al. 2023).

Dong et al. (2023) demonstrated that when a chatbot displayed a confused expression following a user error, participants responded with more empathy and engagement than when the same content was text-only. Similarly, Gobron et al. (2013) found that subtle facial expressions in virtual avatars enhanced emotional realism, leading to stronger perceptions of warmth and shared understanding.

However, as Seeger et al. (2021) and Derks et al. (2024) caution, the benefits of facial cues rely heavily on their consistency and subtlety. Incoherent expressions or those that fall into the “uncanny valley” can elicit discomfort and undermine the agent’s credibility. To be effective, emotionally responsive AI should maintain coherence by ensuring that facial cues align with dialogue and conversational context; moderation, by avoiding overly intense or intrusive expressions; and cultural adaptability, as users’ interpretations of emotional signals are shaped by cultural expectations (Yang et al. 2024).

While facial expressiveness can indeed foster affective closeness and enhance user satisfaction, it also carries the risk of diminishing perceived autonomy. Wang et al. (2024) found that emotionally expressive agents may unintentionally steer users’ feelings, subtly influencing their emotional states and reducing their sense of independent decision-making.

These dynamics raise further questions about emotional perception and advice evaluation:

- H3a.** Dynamic facial expressions in AI agents increase trust.
- H3b.** Dynamic facial expressions in AI agents strengthen perceived empathy.
- H3c.** Dynamic facial expressions in AI agents improve the perceived quality of advice.

Neuroscientific studies reveal that, despite behavioral realism, users process interactions with AI differently at the neural level. Human presence triggers broader and deeper brain engagement than even the most advanced AI agents, suggesting a biological limitation to simulated empathy and co-presence (Harris 2023).

These mechanisms not only impact emotional connection, but may also influence broader evaluative perceptions such as empathy, trust, and perceived advice quality—dimensions explored in hypotheses H3a–H3c.

Ethics, transparency, and trustworthiness

Beyond engagement, emotional expressiveness in AI agents raises pressing ethical concerns. While emotional cues may signal empathy, they can also mislead users when the system lacks genuine understanding or intentionality (Floridi & Cowls 2019).

Lindgren et al. (2024) warn that users may misinterpret pre-programmed expressions as authentic concern, particularly in sensitive contexts such as healthcare or legal services. This can undermine trust if users feel manipulated. Transparency is therefore essential.

In parallel, scholars have raised concerns that emotionally expressive AI may commodify care and simulate relationships without genuine reciprocity, particularly in contexts of loneliness or psychological vulnerability. This “artificial companionship” can create emotional dependencies while lacking the ethical depth of human care relationships (Savic 2024). Balasubramaniam et al. (2023) stress that emotional AI systems must clearly disclose whether expressions are static, contextually generated, or adaptive.

Moreover, vulnerable populations such as younger and older users may over-attribute emotion to non-human systems (Brunswick et al. 2024), further highlighting the importance of transparency and digital literacy. Neutral interfaces, by contrast, are more likely to be perceived as transparent and ethically aligned, particularly in contexts where neutrality and objectivity are valued (Krauter 2024).

Thus, we propose:

H2a. AI agents without dynamic facial expressions are perceived as more transparent.

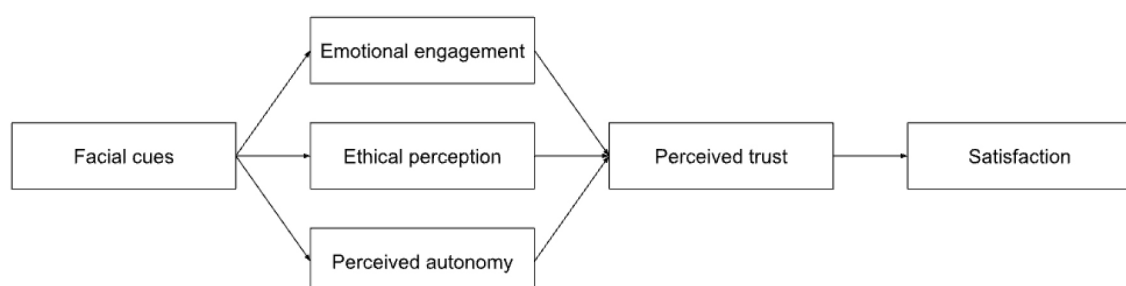
H2b. AI agents without dynamic facial expressions are perceived as more ethical.

The perception of emotional cues as sincere or manipulative can strongly affect users' ethical evaluation of the system—especially in sensitive or high-stakes domains.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses an exploratory framework to examine the relationships between facial expressions, emotional closeness, satisfaction, and trust, aiming to validate a conceptual model for enhancing AI chatbot interactions. The model suggests facial cues strengthen emotional closeness, satisfaction, trust, and perceptions of transparency and ethics—key for effective customer experiences. It builds on foundational works from Mayer et al. (1995) on trust, Oliver (1999) on satisfaction, and Nass & Moon (2000) on human-machine interactions. Structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with bootstrapping (5000 resamples) was used to test the hypotheses, suitable for complex models with smaller samples. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model.

Figure 1
Conceptual Model



The preceding literature review highlights how dynamic emotional cues, particularly facial expressions, influence users' perceptions across multiple dimensions of interaction. These cues act as socio-emotional signals that modulate perceived empathy, satisfaction, and credibility in human–AI communication. Building on these theoretical insights, we now derive the hypotheses tested in the present study.

H1a, H1b, and H1c: emotional engagement and autonomy

Facial expressions—when congruent with the interactional context—enhance social presence by triggering anthropomorphic perceptions (Biocca et al. 2003; Odhiambo 2024). Prior studies demonstrate that emotionally expressive agents improve relational closeness (Lindgren et al. 2024) and user compliance in customer service contexts (Adam et al. 2021). Perceived mind attribution and emotional realism, facilitated by consistent nonverbal cues, are known to foster emotional closeness and affective involvement (Lee et al. 2020; Seeger et al. 2021). These findings support the assumption that expressive agents foster emotional proximity (H1a) and user satisfaction (H1b).

At the same time, several scholars caution that emotionally adaptive agents—especially those deploying subtle nonverbal modulation—may “steer” user reactions or create a sense of emotional influence, thereby reducing perceived autonomy (Wang et al. 2024; Pelau et al. 2021). This justifies the hypothesis that emotional expressiveness could decrease users' perception of control or autonomy (H1c).

H2a and H2b: perceived transparency and ethical alignment

While expressiveness can simulate warmth, it may also obscure the inner logic of AI systems. In contexts where neutrality and fairness are expected—such as healthcare or financial services—excessive emotion can be viewed as biasing or manipulative (Floridi & Cowls 2019). Prior research suggests that neutral interfaces, devoid of affective cues, are more readily perceived as objective and transparent (Krauter 2024).

Moreover, ethical perception is closely tied to system explainability and the authenticity of interaction (Brunswick et al. 2024). Users who cannot distinguish genuine empathy from artificial simulation may question the moral integrity of the system. Algorithmic transparency—especially concerning emotional signals—is thus critical to avoid ethical ambiguity (Balasubramaniam et al. 2023). Based on this, we hypothesize that neutral agents will be rated as more transparent (H2a) and more ethically aligned (H2b) than expressive agents.

H3a, H3b, and H3c: trust, empathy, and advice quality

Prior work has emphasized that emotional expressiveness can serve as a trust cue, suggesting warmth, competence, and relational intent (Seeger et al. 2021; Van Pinxteren et al. 2020).

However, trust formation also depends on perceived competence, consistency, and contextual appropriateness (Lee & See 2004). While we expect emotional cues to increase empathy perception (H3b), their role in trust (H3a) and advice quality (H3c) may be more complex.

Evidence from spontaneous interaction studies (Gobron et al. 2013; Dong et al. 2023) shows that emotional cues do improve relational warmth, but not necessarily judgment-related trust or perceived informational value. Recent findings (Lindgren et al. 2024) even suggest that neutral expressions can enhance advice credibility by reducing the perception of bias. Thus, while facial expressions are likely to increase empathy, they may not translate into higher trust or perceived informational quality.

METHOD

This within-subjects experiment involved 48 voluntary participants (27 female, 21 male) from a French university, all fluent in English. Written consent was obtained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time.

Procedure

Participants interacted with two chatbots presented in a randomized order (digital ID randomizer):

KukiAI: A chatbot equipped with dynamic facial expressions. The expressions were automatically triggered in real-time based on the emotional tone of the conversation. KukiAI's visual face reacted dynamically by detecting sentiment cues

from participants' messages and adjusting expressions (e.g., smiling for positive input, concerned expressions for negative contexts).

ChatGPT: A text-based chatbot without any visual representation.

Each participant completed two unscripted interactions per chatbot: one personal inquiry and one formal task, covering both emotional and objective topics. A brief classroom demonstration with an expressive agent was conducted beforehand to reduce novelty effects. Each session lasted 10-15 minutes per chatbot, with a one-hour total limit, including questionnaire completion.

The 15-minute familiarization phase was designed to reduce potential novelty effects, drawing on established protocols in human-agent interaction research (e.g., Admoni et al. 2017). However, we note that participants in this study were not complete novices in AI interaction: all were enrolled in a digital marketing program and had previously used ChatGPT in class-based assignments and exercises. This prior exposure likely reduced the risk of biased responses linked to unfamiliarity or surprise, especially regarding the chatbot's capabilities and behavior. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that emotional expressiveness may still produce more subtle novelty effects, particularly in terms of facial dynamics.

Measurement and analysis

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire measured emotional engagement, trust, ethicality, autonomy, and satisfaction, adapted from Davis (1983) and Deci & Ryan (2000). Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with 5000-bootstrap resampling, CFA, and ANOVA to compare conditions.

Reliability and sample adequacy

Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.75, confirming strong internal consistency. Convergent and discriminant validity were established (AVE >0.50, HTMT ratios within thresholds).

The sample size (n=48) was adequate for exploratory PLS-SEM analysis, as recommended by Hair et al. (2021), considering the effect sizes ($R^2 = 0.08$ to 0.46) and bootstrapping with 5000 resamples to ensure statistical robustness.

Experimental modality: rationale and bias control

The expressive chatbot used in this study is not a CGI-rendered figure, but a minimalist visual avatar capable of displaying the six facial expressions (Sharma et al. 2017), triggered in real-time by message polarity. These expressions (e.g., smile, concern, neutral) provide a form of emotional feedback, yet do not constitute a high-fidelity 3D animation or realistic human simulation. This low-complexity anthropomorphic layer was chosen to reflect real-world applications where emotional cues are increasingly embedded in service interfaces.

The decision to explore facial expressiveness rather than vocal tone (e.g., prosody) stems from both technical and conceptual reasons. First, while emotional intonation—what researchers describe as emotional prosodic texture—is theoretically relevant, it is not yet supported in most commercial voice assistants like Siri or Alexa. Conversely to human interaction (André et al. 2016), these systems generally produce emotionally neutral, flat vocal output that cannot be dynamically adjusted in real time to the user's input. As such, integrating an audio-based interface would not have created the expressive contrast needed for this study. Second, facial expressions have been shown to have a stronger and more immediate impact on perceived empathy and social presence than auditory cues alone (Gobron et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2023). This makes them an appropriate starting point for assessing emotional modulation in conversational AI.

FINDINGS

Experimental modality: rationale and bias control

Cronbach's alpha values for all variables exceeded 0.750, indicating strong internal reliability and minimal measurement errors. The values ranged from 0.756 (KAUTO) to 0.953 (KPROX) for the model with facial expressions, and from 0.758 (SAT) to 0.926 (PROX) for the model without facial expressions, which aligns with Nunnally's (1978) criteria for robust internal consistency.

Convergent validity was supported by factor loadings above the 0.600 threshold and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.500, consistent with Fornell and Larcker's (1981) recommendations. Discriminant validity was

verified as the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios of inter-construct correlations were within recommended thresholds, with confidence intervals falling within acceptable limits (Table 2).

To further verify discriminant validity, inter-construct correlations were compared with the square roots of the corresponding AVE values. The square roots of the AVE values consistently exceeded the inter-construct correlations (Table 1), confirming conceptual distinctiveness (Bagozzi et al. 1991).

Table 1

Convergent Validity (AVE) analysis: strong convergent validity across all measured variables

	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistics	p-value
KAUTO	0,465	0,061	7,626	0,000
KCONF	0,681	0,042	16,116	0,000
KETHIC	0,705	0,052	13,523	0,000
KPROX	0,779	0,042	18,445	0,000
KSAT	0,575	0,053	10,937	0,000
	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistics	p-value
AUTO	0,56	0,051	10,943	0,000
CONF	0,581	0,056	10,287	0,000
ETHI	0,647	0,05	12,849	0,000
PROX	0,71	0,04	17,558	0,000
SAT	0,434	0,094	4,629	0,000

Table 2

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT): evidence of discriminant validity among variables

	2.5%	97.5%
CONF <-> AUTO	0,64	0,836
ETHIC <-> AUTO	0,407	0,68
ETHIC <-> CONF	0,662	0,824
PROX <-> AUTO	0,765	0,943
SAT <-> PROX	0,847	0,955
	2.5%	97.5%
CONF <-> AUTO	0,384	0,678
ETHI <-> AUTO	0,572	0,788
PROX <-> AUTO	0,641	0,816
SAT <-> PROX	0,388	0,661

Common method bias (CMB) was assessed using the common latent factor (CLF) analysis. The differences between the CLF and non-CLF model estimations ranged from 0.012 to 0.038, staying below the 0.050 threshold recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003), indicating no significant method biases.

The structural model was assessed using PLS-SEM, evaluating six direct paths for the model with facial expressions and five for the model without facial expressions. The goodness-of-fit value SMR supported the model's quality (Table 3).

Table 3

Internal Consistency (Cronbach's Alpha): high reliability across both experimental conditions

	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistics	p-value
KAUTO	0,756	0,078	9,712	0,000
KCONF	0,931	0,015	61,007	0,000
KETHIC	0,915	0,022	41,008	0,000
KPROX	0,953	0,013	76,022	0,000
KSAT	0,842	0,044	19,301	0,000
	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistics	p-value
AUTO	0,862	0,03	28,808	0,000
CONF	0,891	0,028	31,576	0,000
ETHI	0,885	0,028	31,163	0,000
PROX	0,926	0,016	56,61	0,000
SAT	0,758	0,075	10,078	0,000

Key findings from structural relationships and ANOVA

The ANOVA results reveal significant patterns in how dynamic facial expressions influence user perceptions across multiple dimensions (Table 4).

Emotional closeness increased significantly with facial expressions (H1A: $F = 8.016$, $p = 0.006$, $R^2 = 0.08$), indicating a moderate but meaningful enhancement of emotional connection when dynamic cues were present. Satisfaction showed a highly significant rise under the same conditions (H1B: $F = 78.347$, $p < 0.0001$, $R^2 = 0.46$), emphasizing a substantial effect size and the capacity of dynamic cues to amplify emotional engagement and interaction quality.

Perceived autonomy, however, showed no significant differences between conditions (H1C: $p = 0.829$), suggesting that while emotional engagement was influenced, users' sense of control remained unaffected. Transparency perceptions were stronger in the absence of facial expressions (H2A: $F = 55.46$, $p < 0.0001$, $R^2 = 0.369$), suggesting interactions without facial cues were seen as more neutral and objective, possibly due to reduced emotional modulation. Ethical perception, however, showed no significant impact (H2B: $p = 0.175$), indicating emotional expressiveness plays a minor role in ethical judgments, which may relate more to reliability and transparency than non-verbal behaviors.

Empathy increased significantly in the presence of facial expressions (H3B: $F = 8.559$, $p = 0.004$; $M = 3.234$ vs. 2.447), highlighting the positive contribution of dynamic cues in fostering emotional warmth and perceived emotional intelligence during interactions. Trust, however, was not significantly influenced (H3A: $p = 0.171$), suggesting other factors like communication clarity and predictability may play a stronger role in trust formation.

Perceived advice quality was rated higher without facial expressions (H3C: $F = 5.196$, $p = 0.025$; $M = 3.44$ vs. 2.901), suggesting a preference for objectivity and more credible feedback when emotional modulation was minimized (Table 4). The detailed SEM model parameters for each hypothesis are provided in Table 5.

Table 4

ANOVA by hypothesis: positive impact of facial expressions on emotional closeness and satisfaction, no effect on trust

Hypothesis	Source	F	p-value	Significance
H1A	Modèle	8,016	0,006	**
H1B	Modèle	78,347	<0,0001	***
H1C	Modèle	0,047	0,829	-
H2A	Modèle	55,46	<0,0001	***
H2B	Modèle	1,872	0,175	-
H3A	Modèle	1,905	0,171	-
H3B	Modèle	8,559	0,004	**
H3C	Modèle	5,196	0,025	*

Table 5

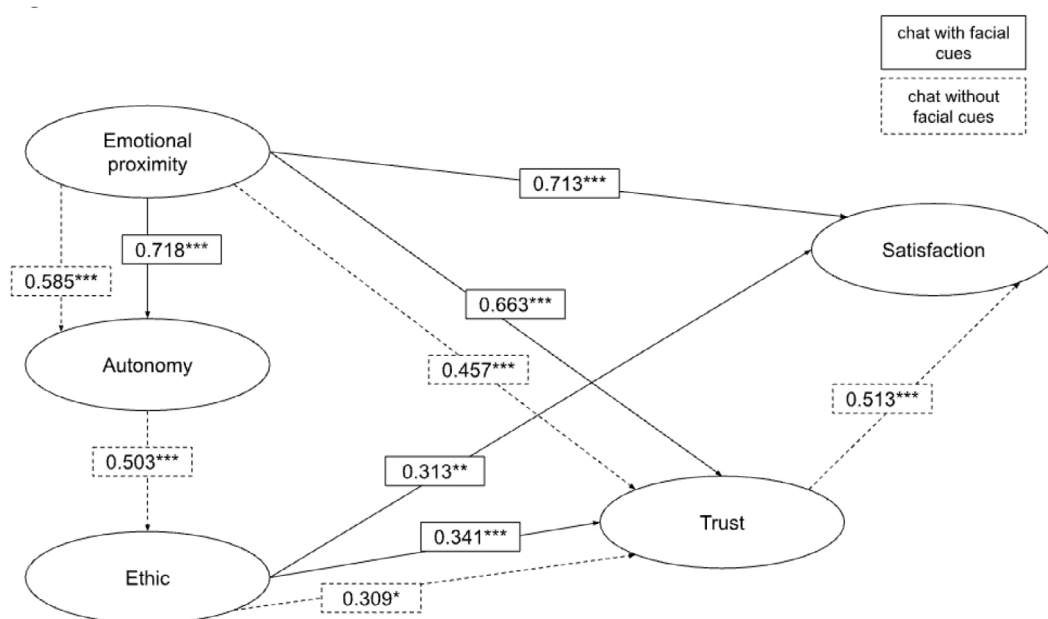
SEM model parameters: facial expressions significantly influence satisfaction and emotional closeness but have no effect on trust perception

Hypothesis	Constant	Coefficient Q1-1	p-value	Significance
H1A	3,091 (p < 0,0001)	-0,647	0,006	**
H1B	2,663 (p < 0,0001)	1,298	< 0,0001	***
H1C	3,407 (p < 0,0001)	0,033	0,829	-
H2A	2,809 (p < 0,0001)	1,245	< 0,0001	***
H2B	2,894 (p < 0,0001)	0,241	0,175	-
H3A	2,907 (p < 0,0001)	0,269	0,171	-
H3B	3,234 (p < 0,0001)	-0,787	0,004	**
H3C	2,901 (p < 0,0001)	0,539	0,025	*

Figure 2 summarizes these relationships across both experimental conditions.

Figure 2

Experimental results: increased emotional closeness and satisfaction, no impact on trust



*Solid lines indicate effects with facial expressions; dashed lines indicate effects without.

Note: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how dynamic facial expressions affect user perceptions across multiple dimensions of human–AI interaction. The results provide empirical confirmation and theoretical nuance to several of the hypotheses tested and reveal new tensions between emotional engagement and ethical evaluation.

Regarding emotional engagement and satisfaction, dynamic facial expressions significantly enhanced both emotional closeness and user satisfaction (H1a, H1b). These findings confirm predictions from social presence theory (Biocca et al. 2003) and echo recent evidence showing that calibrated emotional cues heighten perceived warmth and human-likeness in AI agents, even in low-stakes contexts (Chen et al. 2024; Lindgren et al. 2024). They also align with Admoni et al. (2016) and Vicci (2024), who emphasize that moderate anthropomorphism can foster connection without triggering discomfort.

Regarding perceived autonomy, the hypothesis (H1c) was not supported: dynamic expressions did not reduce users' sense of control. Contrary to prior concerns that anthropomorphic cues may steer behavior or diminish agency (Song & Luximon 2021; Deci & Ryan 2000), our results suggest that subtle emotional modulation, when well-calibrated, does not compromise perceived autonomy. This implies that emotional expressiveness can be integrated without threatening user independence, offering reassurance to designers aiming to balance affective engagement with user agency.

Regarding transparency, agents without facial expressions were perceived as significantly more transparent (H2a). This supports ethical design frameworks that prioritize neutrality and clarity, particularly in high-stakes or advisory settings (Floridi & Cowls 2019; Krauter 2024). It also reinforces concerns that emotional cues—even when well-intended—may obscure system logic or suggest artificial emotional understanding.

Regarding perceived ethicality, dynamic expressions had no significant effect (H2b). Users did not equate emotional expressiveness with higher ethical risk, unless manipulation or insincerity was perceived. This highlights the importance of transparency mechanisms, such as disclosures about how facial expressions are generated, as emphasized by (Balasubramaniam et al. 2023). Emotional modulation alone may not compromise ethical judgments unless contextual cues imply deception.

Regarding trust (H3a), no significant improvement was detected with facial expressions—despite increases in empathy (H3b), as predicted. This supports the idea that while emotional signals may evoke relational warmth, they do not necessarily foster deeper or lasting trust. Indeed, one possible explanation lies in the nature of perceived empathy itself: users may feel momentarily understood, but this perception does not always translate into durable trust. As Pelau et al. (2021) caution, repeated interactions with emotionally engaging AI could even erode essential human soft skills and distort identity regulation. In addition, Cheng et al. (2024) highlight that trust-building is especially fragile during first encounters, where perceived authenticity plays a pivotal role. If the AI agent's emotional signals are not trusted, users may disengage entirely—limiting the long-term effectiveness of even the most expressive designs.

Regarding empathy, dynamic expressions did significantly improve perceived empathy, consistent with expectations (H3b). Users interpreted expressive agents as more emotionally attuned, which aligns with prior studies emphasizing the relational benefits of nonverbal cues (Dong et al. 2023; Gobron et al. 2013). However, this relational gain did not extend to perceptions of trust or ethicality, suggesting a disconnect between momentary emotional resonance and broader evaluative judgments.

Regarding advice quality, agents without facial expressions were rated more positively (H3c), suggesting that emotional cues may undermine perceptions of objectivity. In informational or analytical contexts—such as finance or healthcare—users may prefer emotionally neutral agents who appear more competent and unbiased. This supports dual-process models of interaction in which affective engagement and cognitive credibility are evaluated independently. Regarding user attachment and brand loyalty, enhanced satisfaction and empathy from expressive agents may foster stronger emotional bonds. Yet, overreliance on emotional cues may reduce long-term credibility if not matched with clarity and competence. Emotional resonance should be seen as a complement—not a substitute—for transparent and reliable system behavior.

Regarding the “uncanny valley” hypothesis, our findings challenge assumptions that facial expressiveness increases discomfort. Moderate, well-timed expressions improved perceptions without evoking unease (Krauter 2024). This suggests that minimal but emotionally congruent cues may provide an optimal balance between affective warmth and user comfort.

This study ultimately positions emotional expressiveness not as a universal enhancer, but as a context-bound lever that must be aligned with ethical design, task expectations, and user trust requirements.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of emotional design in conversational AI by clarifying how dynamic facial expressions impact relational, ethical, and cognitive user outcomes. It addresses a gap in prior work by integrating emotional cues with broader user perceptions such as transparency, autonomy, and trust—key factors in the sustainable adoption of AI.

First, the study deepens social presence theory (Biocca et al. 2003) by confirming that moderate facial expressions—rather than fully human-like simulation—can sufficiently stimulate affective closeness and satisfaction. This shows that users respond positively to subtle relational cues, expanding current models of anthropomorphic engagement in everyday contexts.

Second, it advances trust formation models in AI by demonstrating that emotional signals alone do not guarantee increased trust (H3a). Instead, trust appears to rely more heavily on transparency, clarity, and system explainability (Lee & See 2004). This nuance challenges the assumption that emotional warmth automatically enhances credibility, particularly in sectors like healthcare, where perceived impartiality is critical.

Third, the findings refine the Automatic Cognitive Empathy Model (ACEM) (Cacioppo et al. 2000), which posits that empathy triggers engagement. While we confirmed that facial expressions increase perceived empathy (H3b), this did not translate into higher trust, nor did it compromise autonomy—contrary to prior assumptions (Song & Luximon 2021). This suggests a more situated model of emotional AI, where emotional design must be adapted to context and task.

Fourth, this research complements ethical AI literature (Floridi & Cowls 2019) by showing that emotional cues are ethically sensitive—but not inherently manipulative. When disclosed transparently and used in moderation, emotional expressiveness may enhance user experience without violating ethical boundaries. However, the lack of perceived ethicality change (H2b) indicates that transparency—not expressiveness—is the main driver of ethical judgment.

Fifth, this study provides theoretical nuance on the relationship between emotional expressiveness and advice quality, a lesser-explored dimension in conversational AI literature. While empathy was strengthened (H3b), perceived advice quality improved in the absence of expressions (H3c), suggesting that objectivity may be interpreted as a proxy for competence in certain contexts. This challenges the assumption that emotional personalization always improves perceived value and points toward a dual-process model of human-AI evaluation, where warmth and credibility are assessed separately. This insight is particularly relevant for understanding brand trust and loyalty, as it highlights the importance of managing both affective and cognitive perceptions in long-term AI-mediated customer relationships.

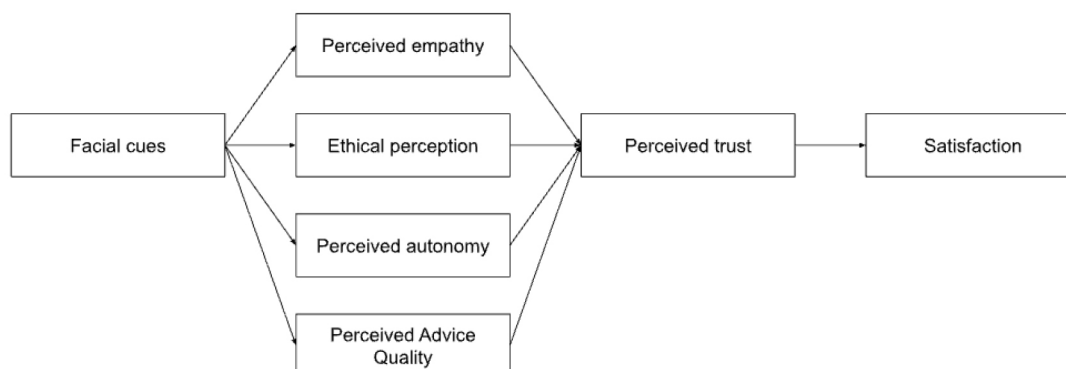
Sixth, our findings build on prior work such as Gobron et al. (2013), who demonstrated that subtle facial cues in virtual agents enhance emotional intensity and perceived presence during spontaneous chatting. While their work validated the emotional salience of micro-expressions, it did not explore how these cues shape broader user judgments such as transparency, trust, or advice quality. Our study extends this foundational research by systematically comparing expressive versus neutral agents and showing that emotional cues—while enhancing empathy—can reduce perceptions of neutrality, particularly in informational contexts. This positions facial expressiveness not only as a relational tool but also as a variable affecting cognitive and ethical appraisals in AI-mediated decision-making.

As a synthesis, the research contributes to inform cross-domain models of AI design. While emotional expressiveness may benefit customer-facing services, its use in expert or advisory contexts must be carefully balanced to avoid undermining trust. This insight supports context-aware models that adapt AI expressiveness based on task sensitivity and user expectations.

Together, these contributions argue for a more integrated framework for AI design—one that aligns emotional expressiveness with transparency, autonomy, and sector-specific norms, rather than treating them as separate design goals.

The effective relationships between facial cues, AI perception, and user engagement are summarized in figure 3.

Figure 3
Revised conceptual model of the study



MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study provides valuable insights for digital marketers, AI managers, and chatbot developers seeking to improve emotional engagement and user satisfaction. Dynamic facial expressions in AI systems are not merely aesthetic; they are crucial tools for fostering emotional connections, enriching user experiences, and enhancing relational bonds. When strategically integrated, these expressions play a critical role in shaping customer experience design.

To effectively personalize AI interactions, it is recommended to use tailored facial expressions that align with users' emotional needs. Emotionally expressive interfaces significantly amplify perceptions of competence and empathy, which are essential for building strong, long-term customer relationships. Consistently incorporating dynamic facial cues throughout the customer journey—from the first interaction to post-purchase follow-ups—creates deeper emotional resonance, leaves lasting impressions, and strengthens customer retention and brand loyalty.

The study also highlights the importance of implementing sector-specific emotional AI strategies. In industries where emotional connection is key, such as healthcare, counseling, and hospitality, emotionally intelligent agents can improve user comfort and trust, making interactions feel more supportive and human. In contrast, in industries where neutrality and factual accuracy are paramount, such as legal services and financial consulting, minimizing emotional expressiveness is advisable. Focusing on clarity and impartiality helps reduce perceived biases and builds credibility and trust.

Ethical concerns related to emotional manipulation are an important aspect of this study. To mitigate these risks, it is recommended to: (1) provide transparency about the emotional cues used in AI systems and how they function, (2) offer users control over the intensity and presence of these emotional cues, and (3) validate these features with diverse user panels to ensure emotional calibration is contextually appropriate.

While emotional cues can enhance engagement, they must be carefully calibrated to avoid unintended emotional influence. In contexts where factual accuracy is critical, such as medical or financial advice, neutral expressions are essential for ensuring transparency and objectivity. However, emotional expressiveness, when modulated properly, can still enhance the user experience by making interactions more relatable and engaging.

Furthermore, the study stresses the need for a contextual and culturally sensitive approach to emotional design. User expectations for emotional expressiveness vary significantly across cultures. Companies should therefore adopt flexible design strategies that account for these differences and empower users by giving them control over the emotional cues they encounter. Allowing users to adjust the intensity and presence of emotional expressions enhances their sense of autonomy, trust, and satisfaction.

By adopting a context-aware strategy—where emotional expressiveness is finely tuned to the specific goals and nature of each interaction—companies can significantly improve user satisfaction, create stronger emotional bonds, and foster long-term customer loyalty. These findings offer a practical framework for AI-driven marketing strategies, emphasizing that emotional cues should not be applied universally, but instead be thoughtfully designed to support both user engagement and transparency in human-AI interactions.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study highlights the significant impact of dynamic facial expressions on emotional engagement, trust, transparency, ethics, and perceived autonomy in AI interactions. By comparing a chatbot with dynamic facial expressions to a neutral, expressionless version, we demonstrate that nonverbal cues can enhance emotional closeness and empathy but do not consistently improve trust or perceived advice quality. Context plays a critical role: while emotional signals may be beneficial in personal contexts, neutrality is often preferred for analytical tasks requiring objectivity.

As conversational systems like ChatGPT increasingly incorporate elements such as emojis, smileys, and dynamic facial features to “humanize” interactions, these findings remain highly relevant. They suggest that a flexible design strategy—alternating between emotional expressiveness and neutrality based on context—can optimize user experience. However, this study has limitations, including a small sample size and brief interaction periods. Furthermore, the study did not examine potential moderating variables such as participants’ prior experience with chatbots, technological affinity, or baseline attitudes toward AI. As highlighted by Song and Luximon (2021), these individual differences can significantly shape how users interpret emotional cues and perceive agency. Future studies should incorporate such psychological or behavioral variables to assess differential effects across user profiles.

Future research could explore multimodal communication (e.g., voice and gestures), cultural differences, or the long-term effects of chatbot “humanization.” Beyond the limited sample size and homogeneity (students), this study does not account for the diversity of sectoral applications of conversational AI. The role of emotional cues may vary widely across industries—from education to public services and e-commerce—requiring further contextual exploration (Yang et al. 2024). Additionally, cultural factors play a key role in how facial expressions and empathy are interpreted, and future studies should include cross-cultural samples to assess generalizability.

Given the heterogeneity of user expectations across industries, future studies should explore how dynamic emotional cues are perceived in specific contexts such as education, tourism, or healthcare, where emotional sensitivity and credibility are unequally valued.

While AI agents can simulate empathy and enhance user engagement, they still fall short of replicating genuine human connection. Perceived empathy does not always translate into actual trust or satisfaction, as users often remain skeptical of the authenticity behind AI’s emotional cues (Rostami & Navabinejad 2023) and may perceive such empathy as performative rather than genuine (Pusztahelyi 2020). Human agents remain preferred in contexts requiring emotional intelligence and adaptability, due to perceptions of benevolence and authenticity that AI systems struggle to replicate (Li & Bitterly 2024), particularly when service interactions involve preferential treatment or sensitive decisions (Choi et al. 2024; Rieger et al. 2021).

Ultimately, while conversational AI provides scalable and accessible solutions, its ability to generate lasting trust and satisfaction remains limited. As shown by Gerlich (2023), emotionally engaging interfaces may prompt behavioral responses similar to those provoked by humans, but they lack the spontaneity and complexity of real social bonds. This comparison highlights a key trade-off: efficiency and availability on the one hand, versus depth of connection and adaptability on the other.

Future research should continue comparing AI-mediated and human interactions, especially in emotionally complex services like counseling, healthcare, or education, where real human contact remains irreplaceable for many users.

Although this study was conducted on participants that were not complete novices in AI interaction such as ChatGPT, we acknowledge that the way emotional cues are perceived may depend not only on task context but also on user familiarity with AI. For example, first-time users may interpret expressions differently from frequent chatbot users, whose expectations and tolerance for anthropomorphism may be more developed (Xu et al. 2025). Such moderating effects warrant further exploration.

Another avenue for future research involves the use of emotionally adaptive voice cues. While current vocal agents lack prosodic variation based on emotional context, advances in affective speech synthesis could enable more nuanced and human-like interactions. Future studies may compare facial, vocal, and multimodal emotional cues to understand their distinct and combined effects on user trust, empathy, and satisfaction.

Addressing these limitations will help develop more personalized and context-aware AI systems, grounded in user diversity and designed to evolve with familiarity and emotional expectations.

Ultimately, the findings emphasize the need to calibrate and adapt facial expressions to enrich AI-user interactions effectively. They offer valuable insights for designing more empathetic and credible conversational agents, better aligned with marketing demands and diverse consumer preferences.

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L'influence des caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur les réseaux sociaux sur les réponses des internautes : une étude qualitative sur YouTube

The influence of product placement characteristics on social media on user responses: a qualitative study on YouTube

Résumé :

Cette étude se concentre sur l'impact des caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur une plateforme de partage de vidéos (YouTube). La littérature sur le placement de produit s'est majoritairement focalisée sur le contexte des médias traditionnels tels que le cinéma, la télévision ou les jeux vidéo. Les recherches antérieures ont ainsi mis en avant plusieurs caractéristiques comme la localisation du produit à l'écran, son intégration à l'oeuvre ou encore son utilisation. A travers ces caractéristiques, un placement de produit influencera les réponses cognitives et conatives du spectateur. Cependant la littérature n'a pas, à notre connaissance, exploré les effets spécifiques des caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube sur les réponses des internautes. Afin d'enrichir la littérature sur le placement de produit et de renseigner les managers, nous avons conduit des entretiens semi-directifs auprès de 15 internautes présentant une diversité de profils. A l'issue de notre étude, il apparaît qu'un placement de produit sur YouTube possède, en plus des trois caractéristiques traditionnelles, une quatrième, la divulgation ou non du lien qui unit le vidéaste avec la marque. Cette dernière semble très importante dans le contexte de YouTube. A l'instar des médias traditionnels, ces quatre caractéristiques influencent la mémorisation, l'attitude envers la marque, l'intention d'achat mais également, et cela est beaucoup plus fort dans le cadre d'un placement de produit sur YouTube que pour les médias traditionnels, les émotions des consommateurs. Celles-ci seront positives, comme la joie ou l'amusement, dans le cas d'un placement intégré à l'oeuvre et divulgué par le vidéaste. Elles pourront être négatives, comme la colère et l'énervement, si le produit est trop visible et vient perturber le visionnage.

Mots clés : Placement de produit ; Réseaux sociaux ; YouTube ; Persuasion ; Comportement du consommateur

Abstract :

This study focuses on the impact of product placement characteristics on a videosharing platform (YouTube). The literature on product placement has predominantly centered on the context of traditional media such as film or television or video games. Previous research has highlighted several characteristics, including the product's on-screen location, its integration into the work, and its usage. Through these features, product placement influences the viewer's cognitive and conative responses. However, to our knowledge, the literature has not explored the specific effects of product placement characteristics on YouTube on user responses. To contribute to the product placement literature and inform managers, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 users representing a diversity of profiles. Following our study, it appears that product placement on YouTube has, in addition to the three traditional characteristics, a fourth one: the disclosure or nondisclosure of the link between the content creator and the brand. The latter seems particularly crucial in the context of YouTube. Similar to traditional media, these four characteristics influence memorization, brand attitude, and purchase intention. However, there is a strong sense of proximity between viewers and the content creator specific to YouTube. Through this relationship, product placement generates emotions in the viewer, either positive, such as joy or amusement, in the case of seamlessly integrated and disclosed placements, or negative, such as anger and annoyance, if the product is overly visible and disrupts the viewing experience.

Keywords: Product placement ; Social media ; YouTube ; Persuasion ; Consumer behavior

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INTRODUCTION

Les internautes passent en moyenne 2 heures et 18 minutes par jour sur Internet tout appareil confondu et cette durée ne cesse de croître (Médiamétrie, 2024). Ils se rendent sur une multitude de sites web notamment YouTube qui est le second site le plus visité dans le monde derrière Google (Semrush, 2024 ; Similarweb, 2024). Parmi ces visiteurs, les 18-34 ans y sont les plus présents et ils y passent en moyenne 50 minutes par jour (Gallup, 2023). Les entreprises ont rapidement compris le potentiel que représentent les réseaux sociaux comme YouTube et les créateurs de contenus qui y sont présents. Les managers ont à leur disposition plusieurs méthodes de communication sur ces plateformes notamment le placement de produit. Il représente à lui seul 78% des sollicitations reçues par les créateurs de contenus et génère chaque année 1,97 milliards de dollars de recettes sur les réseaux sociaux (Navarro, 2023). Le placement de produit est une technique de persuasion qui est tout d'abord apparue au cinéma avant de se développer dans d'autres médias comme la télévision ou encore les jeux vidéo. Malgré sa forte présence sur les réseaux sociaux, les recherches sur le placement se sont pour le moment surtout concentrées sur les médias traditionnels, mettant en évidence plusieurs de ses caractéristiques comme la localisation, l'intégration et l'utilisation (Balasubramanian et al., 2006). La littérature a montré que ces différentes caractéristiques impactent principalement la mémorisation (Gupta et Lord, 1998 ; Bressoud et al., 2010), l'attitude envers la marque (Dens et al., 2012 ; Yang et Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007) et l'intention d'achat (Gould et al., 2000 ; Karrh et al., 2001). Néanmoins, ces recherches ont été menées dans le contexte des médias traditionnels comme le cinéma, la télévision ou les jeux vidéo et ne prennent donc pas en compte les spécificités des réseaux sociaux. Dans le cadre de cette recherche, nous avons choisi de nous intéresser au placement de produit sur YouTube qui est une plateforme de partage se distinguant des médias traditionnels par son contenu généré par les utilisateurs eux-mêmes (User Generated Content), contrairement à la télévision ou au cinéma qui diffusent du contenu professionnel (Aichner et al., 2021). Cette singularité, propre aux réseaux sociaux, se traduit par une forte proximité ressentie par le spectateur pour qui le créateur de contenu devient « un ami » plus qu'une célébrité traditionnelle (Chae, 2018 ; Ferchaud et al., 2018). Dans la mesure où cette spécificité importante ne figure pas dans les recherches relatives au placement de produit dans les médias traditionnels, il nous semble prudent de ne pas généraliser les résultats de ces dernières au cas de YouTube sans un minimum de vigilance. Plus précisément, il convient de se demander si un placement de produit sur YouTube présente des caractéristiques spécifiques et comment ces dernières

INTRODUCTION

On average, internet users spend 2 hours and 18 minutes per day online across all devices, a figure that continues to grow (Médiamétrie, 2024). Among the wide range of websites visited, YouTube ranks as the second most visited platform globally, following only Google (Semrush, 2024; Similarweb, 2024). Within this user base, individuals aged 18 to 34 are particularly active, spending an average of 50 minutes per day on the platform (Gallup, 2023). Companies have swiftly recognized the potential of social media platforms such as YouTube, as well as the influence of the content creators who operate within them. Managers now have access to various communication tools on these platforms, one of the most prominent being product placement. This technique alone accounts for 78% of the promotional requests received by content creators and generates an estimated \$1.97 billion in annual revenue on social media platforms (Navarro, 2023). Product placement is a persuasive communication strategy that first emerged in cinema before extending to other media formats such as television and video games. Despite its widespread presence on social media, academic research on product placement has primarily focused on traditional media, identifying several key dimensions such as localization, integration, and usage (Balasubramanian et al., 2006). The literature has shown that these characteristics mainly influence brand recall (Gupta & Lord, 1998; Bressoud et al., 2010), brand attitude (Dens et al., 2012; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007), and purchase intention (Gould et al., 2000; Karrh et al., 2001). However, these studies have been conducted within the context of traditional media, cinema, television, and video games, and therefore do not account for the specific dynamics of social media environments. In this study, we focus on product placement on YouTube, a content-sharing platform that stands apart from traditional media due to its user-generated content (UGC), in contrast to the professionally produced content typical of television or cinema (Aichner et al., 2021). This fundamental distinction gives rise to a sense of proximity between viewers and content creators, who are often perceived more as "friends" than traditional celebrities (Chae, 2018; Ferchaud et al., 2018). Given that this unique relational dynamic is absent from studies conducted in traditional media contexts, it would be inappropriate to generalize those findings to YouTube without careful consideration. More specifically, it is essential to investigate whether product placement on YouTube possesses distinctive features and how these may influence consumer responses?

To address this question and given the scarcity of existing research on the topic, we conducted an exploratory study based on 15 semi-structured interviews

peuvent influencer les réactions des consommateurs ?

Pour répondre à cette question, et en raison de la rareté des recherches sur ce sujet, nous nous proposons de conduire une recherche exploratoire prenant la forme de 15 entretiens semi-directifs conduits auprès d'internautes. Cette dernière se propose, d'une part, de recenser les caractéristiques perçues d'un placement de produit sur YouTube, d'autre part, de mettre au jour leurs effets respectifs sur les réponses cognitives, émotionnelles et conatives des individus. Sur le plan théorique, ce travail a pour finalité d'enrichir la littérature sur le placement de produit en démontrant que sur YouTube une caractéristique supplémentaire, par rapport aux médias traditionnels, semble devoir être prise en compte, à savoir la divulgation du lien qui unit le vidéaste et la marque. La recherche se propose également de mettre au jour les relations potentielles entre chacune des dimensions d'un placement de produit sur YouTube et les réactions cognitives, émotionnelles et conatives des internautes. A cette occasion, nous montrerons l'importance que prennent les émotions des consommateurs dans la compréhension des effets d'un placement de produit sur ce réseau social. Enfin, d'un point de vue pratique, ce travail renseigne les managers sur la manière dont il convient d'actionner (ou non) chacune des caractéristiques d'un placement de produit selon les objectifs marketing poursuivis (par exemple, augmentation de la mémorisation de la marque et/ou de l'attitude envers cette dernière, génération d'émotions positives et/ou évitement d'émotions négatives, augmentation de l'intention d'achat du produit et/ou de sa recommandation). Après avoir exposé le cadre conceptuel de notre étude, nous détaillerons la méthodologie de recherche mise en œuvre. Puis, nous présenterons et discuterons nos résultats avant de conclure par les limites et les perspectives de notre travail.

REVUE DE LA LITTÉRATURE

Le concept de placement de produit et ses différentes caractéristiques

Selon Balasubramanian (1994, p. 31), le placement de produit est un type de message dit hybride qui peut être défini comme « *un message publicitaire payant destiné à influencer les spectateurs d'un film (ou d'un programme télévisé) via l'entrée planifiée et discrète d'un produit de marque dans le dit film (ou programme télévisé)* ». A la suite d'une méta analyse sur 874 articles, Guo et al. (2019) ont identifié trois principales composantes pour un placement de produit : « *(1) une intégration planifiée et délibérée, (2) la capacité à délivrer discrètement une intention de persuader et*

with internet users. The objective of this study is twofold: first, to identify the perceived characteristics of product placements on YouTube, and second, to uncover their respective effects on individuals' cognitive, emotional, and conative responses. From a theoretical perspective, this research aims to contribute to the literature on product placement by demonstrating that, on YouTube, an additional dimension must be considered compared to traditional media: the disclosure of the relationship between the content creator and the brand. The study also seeks to examine the potential links between each dimension of YouTube-based product placements and users' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions. In doing so, we highlight the critical role of consumer emotions in understanding the impact of product placements on this social media platform. From a managerial standpoint, this research offers practical insights into how marketers can strategically activate, or deliberately avoid, specific characteristics of a product placement, depending on their marketing objectives (e.g., enhancing brand recall and/or brand attitude, eliciting positive emotions and/or mitigating negative ones, increasing purchase intent and/or encouraging product recommendation). Following a presentation of the conceptual framework, we outline the research methodology employed. We then present and discuss the findings before concluding with the study's limitations and future research perspectives.

LITTERATURE REVIEW

The concept of product placement and its key characteristics

According to Balasubramanian (1994, p. 31), product placement is a form of hybrid advertising defined as “*a paid advertising message aimed at influencing viewers of a movie (or television program) through the planned and unobtrusive entry of a branded product into the movie (or television program)*”. Building on this foundational definition, Guo et al. (2019), following a meta-analysis of 874 articles, identified three core components of product placement: “*(1) planned and deliberate integration, (2) the ability to discreetly deliver a persuasive intent, and (3) targeted integration in exchange for money or other assets of value*” (Guo et al., 2019, p. 2). Based on these components, researchers have outlined several defining characteristics of product placement within the context of traditional media.

The first characteristic is localization, which refers to the concrete modalities through which a product is embedded into the media content, such as:

- the spatial prominence of the product, whether it appears in the foreground or background of a scene (Gupta & Lord, 1998);

(3) *une intégration ciblée contre de l'argent ou d'autres actifs de valeur* » (Guo et al., 2019, p. 2). Partant de cette définition, les chercheurs ont mis en évidence plusieurs caractéristiques du placement de produit dans le contexte des médias traditionnels.

La première est la localisation qui représente les modalités concrètes de placement d'un produit comme :

- l'endroit où le produit se situe. Soit au premier plan soit au second plan dans le décor (Gupta et Lord, 1998) ;
- le moment où le produit apparaît à l'écran (Gupta et Gould, 2007) ;
- le nombre de placements différents présent dans l'œuvre (Bressoud et Lehu, 2008) ;
- la durée de présence à l'écran du produit et le nombre de fois où il est montré (Auty et Lewis, 2004) ;
- le type de message qui peut être auditif et/ou visuel (Cholinski, 2012).

La seconde caractéristique est l'intégration du produit dans l'œuvre. Elle représente la cohérence perçue entre le produit et l'environnement de l'œuvre. Cela permet au créateur de l'œuvre d'ancrer son récit dans le réel (DeLorme et Reid, 1999). Pour l'entreprise, l'objectif est d'associer son produit avec des éléments externes dans l'esprit des consommateurs. La troisième caractéristique est l'utilisation ou non du produit dans l'œuvre par un personnage.

Ce dernier peut utiliser le produit à un seul moment ou bien l'utiliser à plusieurs reprises (Yang et Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007).

Les effets des caractéristiques du placement de produit sur les réactions du consommateur

D'après les recherches menées dans le contexte des médias traditionnels, chacune de ces caractéristiques peut impacter la mémorisation, au travers du rappel de la marque et de la reconnaissance de la marque (Babin et al., 2021 ; Bressoud et al., 2010), l'attitude envers la marque des consommateurs (Yang et Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007) ou encore l'intention d'achat (Gould et al., 2000).

Les effets de la localisation

Pour Bressoud et Lehu (2008), le spectateur aura une plus forte probabilité de se rappeler le produit si ce dernier est placé au centre de l'écran. Gupta et Gould (2007) ont, pour leur part, étudié le moment d'apparition du placement de produit au sein des jeux télévisés.

Pour cela, ils ont utilisé l'émission *The Price Is Right* (Le Juste Prix). Ainsi, un produit que le candidat pourra gagner au début du jeu aura un meilleur impact sur la mémoire des téléspectateurs qu'un produit apparaissant à la fin. La durée d'exposition aura également un impact

- the timing of the product's appearance within the narrative (Gupta & Gould, 2007);
- the number of distinct placements within the content (Bressoud & Lehu, 2008);
- the duration of the product's screen presence and the frequency with which it is shown (Auty & Lewis, 2004);
- the sensory modality through which the product is presented, visually, auditorily, or both (Cholinski, 2012).

The second characteristic is integration, which reflects the perceived congruence between the product and the narrative context. From the creator's perspective, this integration helps ground the storyline in reality (DeLorme & Reid, 1999). For brands, the aim is to associate the product with contextual elements in the consumer's mind, thereby enhancing its symbolic value. The third characteristic is product usage by characters within the content.

This can range from a one-time interaction to repeated use of the product by a character (Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007).

The effects of product placement characteristics on consumer responses

Research conducted in the context of traditional media has shown that each of the core characteristics of product placement can influence consumer memory, specifically brand recall and brand recognition (Babin et al., 2021; Bressoud et al., 2010), as well as brand attitude (Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007) and purchase intention (Gould et al., 2000).

Effects of localization

According to Bressoud and Lehu (2008), a product placed at the center of the screen is more likely to be recalled by viewers. Gupta and Gould (2007) examined the impact of placement timing in television game shows, using *The Price Is Right* as a case study. Their findings suggest that products introduced early in the program are better remembered by viewers than those appearing toward the end. Exposure duration also positively influences brand recall: the longer or more frequently the product is shown, the greater the memorability (Auty & Lewis, 2004; Babin & Carder, 1996; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005). In video game contexts, this effect is amplified when users are already familiar with the brand (MartíParreño et al., 2017). Furthermore, combining visual and auditory cues enhances memorability, as shown by Cholinski (2012). To maximize the impact of product placement on viewer memory, it is therefore advisable for the product to appear prominently in the foreground, early in the content, in isolation, for a longer duration, and through both visual and auditory channels.

positif sur le rappel de la marque. Plus le placement sera long ou répété, plus la mémorisation sera élevée (Auty et Lewis, 2004 ; Babin et Carder, 1996 ; Schneider et Cornwell, 2005). Dans le contexte des jeux vidéo, cet effet sera amplifié si l'utilisateur est également familier avec la marque (Martí-Parreño et al., 2017). Enfin, le placement peut combiner un message audio et visuel du produit afin d'augmenter la mémorisation (Cholinski, 2012). Pour augmenter l'impact d'un placement de produit sur la mémorisation du spectateur, il faut donc que ce dernier soit de préférence au premier plan, au début, qu'il apparaisse seul sur une grande durée et avec un message auditif et visuel.

Néanmoins, même si ces modalités augmentent la mémorisation, ceci n'est pas forcément le cas de l'attitude envers la marque. En effet, lorsque le produit devient trop visible, cela peut être dommageable pour l'attitude envers la marque des consommateurs (Marchand et al., 2015). Dans ce genre de situation, le produit engendre de l'irritation qui agira comme un médiateur de la relation entre le placement et l'attitude envers la marque (Avramova et al., 2021). A l'inverse, quand le placement reste plus discret, il aura un effet positif sur l'attitude envers la marque (Dens et al., 2012).

Les effets de l'intégration

Au-delà de la localisation du placement, son intégration dans l'intrigue de l'œuvre constitue un point important. Dans un marché concurrentiel, une entreprise souhaitant se faire connaître et se développer devra user d'associations mnémotechniques. L'objectif est donc d'associer son produit avec un ou plusieurs autres éléments dans l'esprit des consommateurs (Keller, 2003). Ainsi, un produit qui est cohérent avec le contexte est mieux perçu par le consommateur et améliorera sa réponse affective (Law et Braun, 2000). Cela semble particulièrement important dans le contexte des jeux vidéo. Wise et al. (2008) prennent l'exemple du jeu « *Island Hoop* » où le joueur a pour objectif d'éviter un certain nombre d'obstacles afin de rejoindre son hôtel. La marque présentée était Orbitz, une agence de voyage, qui reste en accord avec le thème du jeu. Cela a eu un impact positif sur l'attitude envers la marque et envers le jeu en question. A l'inverse, si l'intégration de la marque dans l'univers du jeu est incohérente, cela pourra engendrer une attitude négative envers la marque, le produit venant ainsi interrompre l'expérience de jeu (Da Silva et Ezan, 2016). Ceci se retrouve dans le secteur de la musique où la congruence entre l'univers de l'artiste et la marque présente une grande importance dans l'efficacité du placement, que ce soit dans les clips vidéo (Degorre, 2017) ou dans les paroles des chansons (Ferguson et Burkhalter, 2015).

However, increased visibility does not necessarily translate into more favorable brand attitudes. On the contrary, excessive prominence can have detrimental effects on consumer perceptions (Marchand et al., 2015). When a product becomes overly conspicuous, it can evoke irritation, which in turn mediates the negative relationship between product placement and brand attitude (Avramova et al., 2021). Conversely, subtle placements tend to foster more favorable attitudes toward the brand (Dens et al., 2012).

Effects of integration

Beyond the placement localization, the degree to which the product is integrated into the narrative is also crucial. In a highly competitive market, brands must leverage associative memory strategies to enhance recognition and positioning. The goal is to create mental links between the product and other contextual elements in the consumer's mind (Keller, 2003). A product that is contextually congruent with the storyline is more positively perceived and can enhance the consumer's emotional response (Law & Braun, 2000). This congruence is particularly important in video game environments. Wise et al. (2008) illustrate this with the game "*Island Hoop*", in which players must navigate obstacles to reach their hotel. The inclusion of the travel agency brand Orbitz, which matched the game's travel theme, positively influenced attitudes toward both the brand and the game itself. In contrast, when a brand is poorly integrated into the game environment, it can interrupt the immersive experience and lead to negative attitudes toward the brand (Da Silva & Ezan, 2016). A similar pattern is found in the music industry, where congruence between the artist's identity and the brand strongly influences the effectiveness of product placement, whether in music videos (Degorre, 2017) or song lyrics (Ferguson & Burkhalter, 2015).

Effects of usage

Regarding product usage, Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) note that when a main character interacts with the product, the placement has a greater cognitive and emotional impact. Russell and Stern (2006) explored how viewers' emotional attachment to fictional characters affects their attitudes toward placed products. They found that viewers who identify with a character tend to adopt that character's attitude toward the product, whether positive or negative. The stronger the emotional bond, the more pronounced this attitudinal transfer. Viewers who admire a fictional character and wish to emulate them are likely to seek out social symbols to project a similar image, and branded products can serve this function. Karrh (1998), for example, cites the case

Les effets de l'utilisation

Concernant l'utilisation, Yang et Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) notent que lorsqu'un personnage principal est en relation avec le produit, l'impact du placement est plus important au niveau cognitif et affectif. Russell et Stern (2006) ont ainsi voulu tester l'impact que peut avoir l'attachement émotionnel d'un spectateur avec un personnage de fiction sur l'attitude qu'aura le consommateur envers un produit placé dans une œuvre de fiction (en l'occurrence une série télévisée). Ils ont découvert que lorsque le spectateur est attaché au personnage, il aura tendance à avoir la même attitude envers le produit que ce personnage, que ce soit positivement ou négativement. Plus le consommateur sera attaché émotionnellement et plus ce transfert sera important. Ainsi, un spectateur appréciant un personnage de fiction et souhaitant véhiculer la même image que lui, cherchera des symboles sociaux lui permettant cela, et les produits pourront l'aider. Karrh (1998) prend l'exemple du film « Flashdance » (1983) où après la sortie beaucoup de jeunes américaines ont cherché à avoir le même pull que l'héroïne afin de reproduire le côté séduisant véhiculé par cette dernière. Dans le domaine des jeux vidéo, c'est souvent le joueur lui-même qui utilise et interagit avec le produit au travers de son avatar. Ce placement de produit « agi¹ », en opposition à un placement « subi² » plus traditionnel, aura des conséquences positives sur l'attitude envers la marque (Da Silva et Ezan, 2016 ; Renault, 2022).

Les spécificités des réseaux sociaux

Les précédentes recherches ont toutes été menées dans le contexte des médias traditionnels et ne peuvent pas être appliquées directement au cas des réseaux sociaux compte tenu de leurs caractéristiques distinctives. Parmi ces dernières, rappelons tout d'abord que les réseaux sociaux s'apparentent à une plate-forme de communication dont le principal objectif est de faciliter les interactions entre ses membres. Sur la base de ces interactions, les individus sont influencés par les opinions des autres et peuvent à leur tour influencer d'autres personnes (Bamakan et al., 2019). Ainsi, lorsque les consommateurs souhaitent avoir des informations ou des avis sur un produit, ils peuvent se tourner vers les réseaux sociaux afin de visualiser des vidéos où des créateurs de contenus leur présentent les produits en tant que consommateur (De Veirman et al., 2017 ; Murugesan, 2007). Ce type de contenu généré par les utilisateurs eux-mêmes (User Generated Content) influence le

of the 1983 film "Flashdance", after which many young American women sought to wear the same sweatshirt as the heroine in order to emulate her seductive appeal. In video games, players often interact directly with branded products through their avatars. This form of "enacted"¹ product placement, contrasting with a more traditional "imposed"² placements, has been shown to positively affect brand attitudes (Da Silva & Ezan, 2016; Renault, 2022).

The specificities of social media

Previous research on product placement has been conducted exclusively in the context of traditional media and cannot be directly applied to social media due to their distinctive features. Chief among these is that social media platforms function primarily as communication tools aimed at fostering interactions among users. Through these interactions, individuals are influenced by others' opinions and, in turn, can influence their own audiences (Bamakan et al., 2019). When seeking information or opinions about products, consumers often turn to social media, where content creators present products from a consumer perspective (De Veirman et al., 2017; Murugesan, 2007). This form of user-generated content (UGC) shapes the format and tone of the videos themselves (Abbas, 2024). On YouTube, for instance, creators typically appear on screen facing the camera, often in home-like settings, possibly their own. They frequently break the "fourth wall"³ by speaking directly to the viewer, sometimes using informal or familiar language, and engage with their audience through the comment section. This interaction fosters a sense of proximity between creators and viewers (Reinikainen et al., 2020). Influencers are at the core of the social media ecosystem, not only as generators of traffic but also as key sources of social presence. Some viewers go on to develop strong parasocial relationships with influencers, which in turn affects the effectiveness of persuasive messages (Du et al., 2023). This perceived closeness is further reinforced by platform-specific cues, such as subscriber count, which can influence consumer attitudes (Charry & Tessitore, 2021).

These unique attributes of social media may significantly shape how consumers respond to product placements. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to systematically apply findings from product placement research in traditional media to platforms like YouTube.

¹ Le joueur interagit et utilise le produit présent dans le jeu.

² Le joueur n'interagit pas et n'utilise pas le produit présent dans le jeu.

¹ The gamer interacts and uses the product directly in the game

² The gamer doesn't interact neither use the product in the game

³ In theatre, the "fourth wall" refers to an imaginary wall located at the front of the stage, separating the performers from the audience and through which the audience observes the action unfolding on stage (Pettengill, 2020).

format même des vidéos (Abbas, 2024). C'est ainsi que sur YouTube, le vidéaste apparaît généralement face à la caméra, dans un décor rappelant une maison (potentiellement la sienne). Il brise régulièrement le « quatrième mur »³ pour s'adresser directement au spectateur, parfois même en le tutoyant. Enfin, il interagit avec lui au travers des commentaires ce qui procure un sentiment de proximité entre le vidéaste et ses spectateurs (Reinikainen et al., 2020). Ces influenceurs sont au centre des réseaux sociaux, générateurs de trafic, mais également de présence sociale. Certains spectateurs vont ainsi développer une relation parasociale forte avec l'influenceur, ce qui impactera directement l'efficacité des tentatives de persuasion (Du et al., 2023). Ce sentiment de proximité ressentie est renforcé par les éléments propres aux réseaux, comme le nombre d'abonnés qui peut directement impacter l'attitude des consommateurs (Charry et Tessitore, 2021).

Les spécificités des réseaux sociaux que nous venons de rappeler peuvent donc influencer potentiellement la manière dont les consommateurs réagissent au placement de produit. C'est pourquoi il nous semble prudent de ne pas appliquer, de manière systématique, au cas de YouTube les résultats des recherches conduites dans le cadre du placement de produit dans les médias traditionnels. Afin de mieux appréhender l'impact des caractéristiques distinctives de YouTube sur les réactions des individus face à un placement de produit, quelques recherches, encore très peu nombreuses à ce jour, ont vu le jour (Chif, 2018 ; Ghysseleinckx, 2019 ; Lombi et Marion, 2017 ; Schwemmer et Ziewiecki, 2018). Si elles viennent enrichir la littérature sur le placement de produit, elles ne répondent pas, en revanche, aux objectifs que nous nous sommes fixés dans le cadre de ce travail, à savoir recenser les caractéristiques perçues d'un placement de produit sur YouTube puis mettre au jour leurs effets respectifs potentiels sur les réactions cognitives, émotionnelles et conatives des internautes. Apporter des éléments de réponse à ces interrogations serait pourtant utile tant les investissements dédiés au placement de produit sur YouTube sont aujourd'hui importants. Afin de participer au développement des recherches en marketing sur ce sujet, nous avons conduit une étude qualitative exploratoire dont nous allons maintenant exposer la méthodologie.

While a few recent studies have begun to explore the influence of YouTube's unique features on consumer reactions to product placement (Chif, 2018; Ghysseleinckx, 2019; Lombi & Marion, 2017; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018), this emerging body of work remains limited in scope. Moreover, these studies do not fully address the objectives of the present research, namely, to identify the perceived characteristics of product placements on YouTube and examine their respective effects on viewers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Given the substantial investments currently being made in YouTube-based product placements, gaining deeper insights into these dynamics would be highly valuable. To contribute to the growing body of marketing research on this topic, we conducted an exploratory qualitative study, the methodology of which is presented in the following section.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 15 individuals who use YouTube with varying degrees of frequency. The interview guide focused on two main themes:

- the perceived characteristics of product placement on YouTube;
- viewers' responses to these characteristics (see Appendix 1 for the specific wording of the interview questions).

The participants correspond to YouTube's primary target demographic, which consists mainly of individuals aged 18 to 35. This convenience sample was intentionally composed to reflect diversity in terms of age, gender, geographic location (Paris vs. other regions), occupation, devices used to access YouTube, types of content viewed, and frequency of platform use (see Appendix 2). The sample size was determined based on the principle of semantic saturation. The average interview duration was 44 minutes. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and fully transcribed to facilitate analysis. A manual thematic content analysis was then conducted, following the methodological steps recommended by Bardin (2013). As part of this process, the frequency of thematic occurrences was calculated. While these frequency counts offer a quantified synthesis of the data collected, they are not intended to be statistically representative, in keeping with the qualitative nature of the research.

³Au théâtre, le quatrième mur désigne un « mur » imaginaire situé sur le devant de la scène, séparant la scène des spectateurs et « au travers » duquel ceux-ci voient les acteurs jouer (Pettengill, 2020).

METHODOLOGIE DE LA RECHERCHE

L'étude a pris la forme d'entretiens semi-directifs conduits en face-à-face auprès de 15 individus se rendant sur YouTube selon des fréquences différentes. Les principales thématiques abordées dans le guide d'entretien étaient les suivantes :

- les caractéristiques perçues d'un placement de produit sur YouTube ;
- les réponses des spectateurs face aux caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube (voir en annexe 1, la manière dont les questions étaient formulées dans le guide d'entretien).

Les personnes interrogées correspondent à la cible de YouTube qui se compose principalement d'individus âgés de 18 à 35 ans. Cet échantillon de convenance a été composé de façon à présenter une diversité de profils en termes d'âge, de genre, de région d'appartenance (Paris vs Province), de métiers, de supports utilisés pour regarder YouTube, de type de contenus visualisés et de fréquence d'utilisation de ce réseau social (voir annexe 2). La taille de notre échantillon s'explique par le respect du principe de saturation sémantique. La durée moyenne des entretiens était de 44 minutes. Chaque entretien a été enregistré avec l'accord du répondant. Il a été ensuite retranscrit en intégralité afin que le discours soit plus facile à appréhender. Nous avons conduit ensuite une analyse de contenu thématique manuelle en respectant les différentes étapes recommandées par Bardin (2013). A cette occasion, les fréquences de citation des thèmes mis au jour ont été calculées. En raison du caractère qualitatif de notre recherche, ces indicateurs quantitatifs ne prétendent pas à une quelconque représentativité statistique mais se proposent de synthétiser, sous forme chiffrée, l'information collectée.

LES RESULTATS DE LA RECHERCHE***Les caractéristiques perçues d'un placement de produit sur YouTube***

L'analyse de nos données révèle que les consommateurs ont tous conscience de l'existence du placement de produit sur YouTube. Si la littérature dédiée à la pratique de cette technique recense traditionnellement ses 3 caractéristiques constitutives dans le cas des médias traditionnels, nos répondants en citent 4 lorsqu'il s'agit de YouTube.

La localisation (37 % des citations, 22 verbatim sur 60) du produit sur YouTube comprend plusieurs modalités comme l'endroit à l'écran où le produit se situe,

RESEARCH FINDINGS***Perceived characteristics of product placement on YouTube***

The analysis of our data reveals that consumers are fully aware of the existence of product placement on YouTube. While the academic literature traditionally identifies three defining characteristics of product placement in the context of traditional media, our respondents mentioned four distinct characteristics in the context of YouTube.

Placement localization (37% of the mentions, 22 out of 60 verbatim). It includes several dimensions such as the position of the product on screen, the timing of its appearance during the video, and its duration of exposure. Exposure time, in particular, appears to be significant for viewers:

"there are two types of product placements: one that's more visible and in the foreground, and another that's more discreet, just part of the background decor" (Female, 23, uses YouTube several times a week);

"the product can appear at the beginning or in the middle of the video" (Female, 18, uses YouTube several hours a day);

"the placement lasts about 10 to 15 seconds, so you don't really get bored" (Male, 24, daily user).

Integration of the product into the content environment (27% of the mentions, 16 out of 60 verbatim). Respondents clearly distinguished between placements that felt coherent with the creator's universe and those that appeared disconnected from the content. In some cases, perceived coherence depended on the creator's perceived expertise in the relevant domain:

"the product still has to match the personality of the person... there needs to be some kind of coherence" (Male, 22, daily user);

"the YouTuber should have some kind of affinity with the field; they need to be credible... not necessarily a professional, but there has to be a link between the placed product and what they usually do" (Female, 23, daily user);

"there are placements that have nothing to do with the video—you can tell it's just about getting a quick paycheck" (Male, 18, several times a week).

Product usage (18% of mentions, 11 out of 60 verbatim). This refers to whether the product is actually used or merely shown in the video, for example, in cooking tutorials, beauty routines, or tech reviews. A specific expectation associated with product placement

le moment où le produit apparaît dans la vidéo et la durée d'exposition. Cette dernière modalité semble être assez importante pour les spectateurs :

« il y a 2 placements de produits, un premier plus visible localisé au premier plan et un second plus discret où le produit est juste présent dans le décor » (Femme, 23 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine) ;
« le produit peut apparaître au début ou au milieu de la vidéo » (Femme, 18 ans, plusieurs heures par jour) ;
« le placement ça doit être 10 à 15 secondes à l'écran, donc tu n'as pas le temps de t'ennuyer » (Homme, 24 ans, tous les jours)

L'intégration (27 % des citations, 16 verbatim sur 60) du produit dans l'univers du vidéaste. Nos répondants différencient ainsi les placements où le produit est incohérent avec le contenu des placements où le produit est cohérent comme faisant partie de la vidéo. Pour certains, cette cohérence dépend de l'expertise perçue du vidéaste dans le domaine :

« il faut quand même que le produit corresponde à la personnalité de la personne....qu'il y ait une certaine forme de cohérence » (Homme, 22 ans, tous les jours) ;
« il faut que le youtubeur ait une affinité avec le domaine, qu'il soit légitime... pas forcément professionnel, mais qu'il y ait un rapport entre le produit placé et ce qu'il fait d'habitude » (Femme, 23 ans, tous les jours) ;
« il y a des placements où il n'y a aucun rapport avec la vidéo, on sent que c'est juste pour prendre un petit billet » (Homme, 18 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine).

L'utilisation (18 % des citations, 11 verbatim sur 60) ou non du produit dans la vidéo. Cela peut être par exemple le cas pour les ingrédients d'une recette, des produits de beauté ou encore du matériel électronique. La particularité d'un placement de produit sur YouTube est que le spectateur s'attend à ce que le vidéaste soit lui-même un consommateur régulier dudit produit :

« si c'est un placement dans une recette et qu'on va montrer les ingrédients qu'on utilise quelques secondes supplémentaires, ça, ça me va » (Femme, 23 ans, tous les jours) ;
« Gaëlle Garcia, elle fait des placements pour une marque qui s'appelle Pin-Up Secret, qui fait différents produits, qu'elle utilise vraiment au quotidien » (Femme, 25 ans, tous les jours) ;
« il a parfois fait des placements de produit, mais il n'utilisait pas le casque. Il le montrait, il en parlait... un vrai placement de produit mais il ne l'utilisait pas » (Homme, 29 ans, plusieurs heures par jour).

on YouTube is that the content creator is perceived as a genuine user of the product being promoted:

"if it's a product placement in a recipe video and they show the ingredients for a few extra seconds, I'm fine with that" (Female, 23, daily user);
"Gaëlle Garcia does placements for a brand called Pin-Up Secret, which makes various products she really uses in her daily life" (Female, 25, daily user);
"he's done product placements before, but he wasn't actually using the headset. He showed it, talked about it... a classic product placement, but without using it" (Male, 29, several hours per day).

Disclosure of the relationship between the creator and the brand, whether verbal or otherwise (18% of mentions, 11 out of 60 verbatim). This characteristic is not traditionally addressed in the literature on product placement in conventional media, but it emerged as particularly salient in the YouTube context. Legally, creators are required to disclose their partnerships, but this disclosure does not necessarily have to be made orally. In many cases, it is only included in the video's written description, which is often overlooked by viewers. Respondents identified two primary modalities: either the placement is subtly disclosed in the written description, or it is explicitly acknowledged orally during the video itself:

"...when they directly tell you it's a product placement" (Male, 24, daily user);
"to me, a good or bad placement depends on whether the YouTuber said it or not" (Female, 28, several hours per day);
"that kind of placement makes it clear what we're getting into" (Female, 23, daily user);
"there are quite a few products where she says, 'This is a product placement... I tried it, and I liked it.' And others where she doesn't say anything" (Male, 35, several times a week).

Characteristics of product placement on YouTube and consumer responses

The impact of product placement characteristics on consumers' emotional responses

On YouTube, a strong sense of proximity often develops between viewers and content creators, resulting in a high level of emotional attachment to the creator. This emotional bond appears to heighten the emotional responses elicited by product placements on YouTube, compared to the same practice in traditional media. More specifically, our data analysis suggests that each of the characteristics of product placement on YouTube is associated with specific emotional reactions among viewers.

La divulgation (18 % des citations, 11 verbatim sur 60) orale ou non du lien qui unit l'entreprise avec le vidéaste. Cette caractéristique n'apparaît pas dans la littérature consacrée au placement de produit dans le contexte des médias traditionnels mais est souvent mise en avant par nos répondants dans le contexte de YouTube. Dans le cas d'un placement de produit, légalement les vidéastes doivent annoncer le lien qu'ils ont avec l'entreprise mais ils ne sont pas forcés de le dire oralement. Ils peuvent simplement le noter dans la section description de leur vidéo qui est rarement lue par les spectateurs. Nos répondants identifient donc deux modalités. Soit le placement est dissimulé dans la vidéo et simplement explicité dans la description écrite. Soit le placement est clairement divulgué à l'oral dans la vidéo par le créateur de contenu :

« ...quand direct ils te disent que c'est un placement de produit » (Homme, 24 ans, tous les jours) ;
 « pour déterminer un bon et un mauvais placement, c'est si le youtubeur a dit ou pas dit » (Femme, 28 ans, plusieurs heures par jour) ;
 « ce type de placement c'est annoncé dans quoi on s'embarque » (Femme, 23 ans, tous les jours) ;
 « y a pas mal de produit où elle dit « c'est un placement... je l'ai essayé, ça m'a plu ». Et d'autres où effectivement elle ne le dit pas » (Homme, 35 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine).

Caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube et réponses des consommateurs

L'impact des caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube sur les réponses émotionnelles des consommateurs

Sur YouTube, il existe un fort sentiment de proximité entre le spectateur et le vidéaste qui se traduit par un attachement émotionnel important à l'égard de ce dernier. Ceci semble avoir pour conséquence d'amener le consommateur à éprouver plus d'émotions face à un placement de produit sur YouTube que face à la même technique mise en œuvre dans les médias traditionnels. Plus précisément, notre analyse des données nous amène à supposer que chacune des caractéristiques du placement de produit sur YouTube est à l'origine d'émotions spécifiques ressenties par les individus interrogés.

Ainsi, la localisation engendre des émotions négatives lorsque le placement devient trop présent à l'écran et dérange le spectateur dans son visionnage. Dans le cadre de notre étude, il semble que ce soit la durée d'apparition du produit qui suscite le plus de réactions chez nos répondants. Ainsi, un placement

Placement localization tends to provoke negative emotions when the placement becomes overly prominent and disrupts the viewing experience. Within our sample, the duration of the product's on-screen presence emerged as the most emotionally salient factor. Extended exposure frequently led to irritation and frustration among respondents:

"but when they insist on it and spend 15 minutes on it, it's unbearable!" (Female, 23, daily user);
"if it's too present and lasts too long, it'll be more like irritation and annoyance" (Male, 22, daily user);
"if we're overexposed to it, it's going to annoy us, we're going to get tired of it" (Male, 18, several times a week).

Integration, by contrast, tends to generate positive emotions when the product is perceived as congruent with the overall content, in which case it can even enhance the entertainment value of the video. Conversely, if the product is perceived as incongruent with the content, it is experienced as an intrusion, leading to negative emotions such as irritation or anger:

"it fit within the context [...]. That was really the perfect placement and ultimately a nice surprise" (Male, 18, several times a week);
"it was consistent with what he usually does, so it made me laugh and I was happy about it" (Male, 29, several hours per day);
"if the placement has no connection, it feels super intrusive—same thing, it's going to be annoying" (Male, 18, several times a week);
"it can also be unpleasant if it's a product I didn't want to see. It depends on whether there's coherence between the YouTuber and the product... if not, it can quickly make me angry" (Female, 23, several times a week).

The use of the product within the video does not appear to be the most emotionally charged characteristic for our respondents. However, when the product is not actually used during the video, the placement is generally perceived as a mere advertisement and may provoke irritation:

"I'll just think, 'Okay, this isn't what they actually use in real life' and I'll end up annoyed because it's just pure promotion" (Female, 23, daily user).

Finally, disclosure emerges as one of the most emotionally salient characteristics for our respondents. Given the strong sense of closeness between viewers and creators on YouTube, the practice of being upfront about the partnership is much better received. Viewers

qui reste trop longtemps visible à l'écran entraîne de l'énervement et de l'irritation chez le spectateur :

« alors que si on insiste et qu'on passe 15 minutes dessus c'est insupportable ! » (Femme, 23 ans, tous les jours) ;

« si c'est trop présent, que ça dure trop longtemps, ce sera plus de l'énervement et de l'agacement » (Homme, 22 ans, tous les jours) ;

« si on est trop exposé à ça, ça va nous énerver, on va en avoir marre de ça » (Homme, 18 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine).

L'intégration, pour sa part, semble générer plutôt des émotions positives chez nos répondants si le produit est cohérent avec l'œuvre globale, devenant ainsi par la même occasion un élément de divertissement. A l'inverse, si le produit est perçu comme non congruent avec le contenu de la vidéo, cela sera vécu comme une intrusion dans leur vidéo et nos enquêtés auront tendance à plutôt ressentir des émotions négatives comme de l'énervement et de la colère :

« c'était dans le contexte [...]. Là c'était vraiment le placement parfait et une bonne surprise finalement » (Homme, 18 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine) ;

« c'était cohérent avec ce qu'il fait d'habitude donc moi ça me faisait rire et j'étais content » (Homme, 29 ans, plusieurs heures par jour) ;

« si le placement n'a aucun lien aussi, on a l'impression que ça va être super intrusif, pareil ça va être énervant » (Homme, 18 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine) ;

« ça peut être aussi désagréable si le produit je n'avais pas envie de le voir. Ça dépend si c'est cohérent entre le youtubeur et le produit ...si ça ne l'est pas, ça peut rapidement me mettre en colère » (Femme, 23 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine).

L'utilisation du produit au sein de la vidéo n'est pas la caractéristique qui génère le plus d'émotions chez nos répondants. Cependant, si le produit n'est pas utilisé dans la vidéo, le placement sera généralement perçu comme une publicité par nos répondants et entraînera potentiellement de l'énervement chez ces derniers :

« je vais me dire « bon, en fait c'est pas du tout ce qu'il utilise dans la vraie vie », et finalement je vais être énervée car c'est juste de la promotion » (Femme, 23 ans, tous les jours).

Enfin, la divulgation semble être une des caractéristiques générant le plus d'émotions chez nos répondants. Dans la mesure où les spectateurs nouent une véritable relation de proximité avec le vidéaste,

tend to appreciate transparency and explanation, which reinforces their trust in the creator. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly difficult for content creators to hide their commercial partnerships, as audiences are now highly aware of product placement practices and skilled at identifying them. When creators attempt to conceal the persuasive intent or fail to provide clear disclosure, this is perceived as a betrayal, often generating strong negative emotions such as anger, sadness, or even disgust:

"honestly, this type of placement would almost make me laugh—

because he says it right at the start" (Male, 35, several times a week);

"so, in cases where the person is honest about the product placement, I'd say I feel positive emotions, like joy" (Female, 28, several hours per day);

"this kind of placement is disturbing, because you feel like it wasn't honest [...] It's annoying, it's frustrating. You feel cheated... betrayed... it's quite sad, actually" (Male, 27, several times a week); *"I place a lot more trust in YouTubers than... I'd almost feel betrayed, actually. I think the closeness that's built with the audience on YouTube means you owe them respect. You owe it to them to be honest and to say when it's a placement, otherwise, I'll get mad and disgusted"* (Female, 25, daily user).

The impact of YouTube product placement characteristics on consumers' cognitive responses

On YouTube, as in traditional media, the characteristics of product placements influence consumers' cognitive responses, primarily through brand recall and attitude toward the brand.

Our data suggest that when a product is displayed prominently, at the beginning of the video, and for a significant duration, it leads to strong brand recall among viewers:

"the fact that the product was introduced in a sketch at the beginning made it more impactful... you remember the brand much more" (Male, 24, daily user);

"so this placement appeared right before my eyes, in the foreground, and I remembered the brand immediately" (Female, 24, daily user).

However, such prominence can also negatively affect brand attitude if it disrupts the viewing experience:

"for example, RhinoShield is on screen for, I don't know, 15 minutes... Sure, I remember the brand, but it doesn't appeal to me. The image I have of them is just really negative" (Male, 27, several times a week).

ils acceptent bien mieux la démarche si ce dernier a l'honnêteté de leur en parler et de leur expliquer. Par ailleurs, il devient de plus en plus difficile pour le vidéaste de dissimuler le lien qui l'unit à une entreprise car les consommateurs sont très au courant de la pratique du placement de produit et savent le reconnaître. Ainsi, dans le cas où le vidéaste cherche à dissimuler la tentative de persuasion ou n'est pas suffisamment explicite sur sa démarche, cela semble vécu comme une trahison susceptible de générer de l'énervement, de la tristesse voire du dégoût :

« limite ce type de placement me ferait marrer parce qu'il va te le dire au début » (Homme, 35 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine) ;
« donc dans le cas d'un placement de produit où la personne a l'honnêteté de le dire, je dirai que je ressens des émotions positives, comme de la joie » (Femme, 28 ans, plusieurs heures par jours) ;
« ce type de placement, c'est dérangeant, parce que tu dis que voilà ce n'était pas honnête [...] c'est chiant, c'est relou. Tu te sens lésé... trahi...c'est assez triste au final » (Homme, 27 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine) ;
« je vais accorder beaucoup plus de confiance sur YouTube que... je vais me sentir presque trahi en fait. Je trouve que la proximité qu'on crée avec son public sur YouTube fait qu'on doit le respecter. On lui doit d'être honnête et de lui dire quand on fait un placement sinon ça va m'énervé et je vais être dégoûtée » (Femme, 25 ans, tous les jours).

L'impact des caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube sur les réponses cognitives des consommateurs

Sur YouTube, comme pour les médias traditionnels, les caractéristiques d'un placement de produit influencent les réponses cognitives de l'individu au travers principalement de sa mémorisation de la marque et de son attitude vis-à-vis de cette dernière.

Ainsi, nos données semblent confirmer que les produits présents au premier plan, au début de la vidéo, avec un grand temps d'apparition à l'écran entraînent sur YouTube une forte mémorisation de la marque :

« mais le fait que le produit soit introduit dans un sketch au début, le truc est plus impactant...tu mémorises beaucoup plus la marque » (Homme, 24 ans, tous les jours) ;
« et du coup ce placement je l'ai vu apparaître devant mes yeux, au premier plan, et j'ai retenu directement la marque » (Femme, 24 ans, tous les jours).

Integration appears to be the characteristic with the strongest influence on brand attitude. A placement that is well integrated into the content is likely to lead to a positive attitude, whereas incoherent placement tends to foster negative attitudes. This effect is often linked to the viewer's perception of the creator. When the creator is perceived positively and the placement is congruent, respondents report a more favorable attitude toward the brand. Moreover, integration may also enhance brand recall, particularly when perceived as authentic and legitimate:

"if you choose someone who doesn't align with the product, it can damage your brand's image" (Female, 23, daily user);
"if the person is a leader in their field and presents a product from that field, we'll trust it, and it'll be beneficial for the brand image" (Female, 23, daily user);
"sometimes, being associated with an incoherent brand can cause image problems" (Male, 18, several times a week);
"for example, the desk chair I'm sitting on is a Secret Lab. I didn't just come up with that brand out of nowhere. It's clearly because I kept seeing streamers sitting on that chair, with the cushion behind them saying Secret Lab. So if I want a gaming chair, it makes sense to choose the one recommended by streamers, rather than one suggested by beauty influencers or whatever, because streamers are more legitimate and coherent in that context" (Male, 35, several hours per day).

Product usage influences both brand recall and attitude toward the brand. According to our respondents, and in contrast to traditional media contexts, product placement on YouTube is perceived more positively when the content creator is a genuine, regular user of the featured product. In other words, for product placement to elicit favorable brand responses, it is not enough for the creator to use the item sporadically; rather, they must demonstrate consistent use across multiple videos. In this regard, repetition, more than simple usage, emerges as a critical factor:

"someone who spends eight hours a day on a chair—it must be a good chair; otherwise, they wouldn't use it, because it's their health, it's their job. So of course it gives a good image of the brand when people actually use the product" (Male, 29, several hours per day);
"he regularly wears a pair of Nikes. He doesn't overemphasize the placement, and I like that. I remember that it's a Jordan One" (Male, 22, daily user).

Cependant, cette mise en avant du produit peut également impacter négativement l'attitude envers la marque si le placement dérange le visionnage :

« par exemple RhinoShield qui reste je ne sais pas...15 minutes à l'écran... alors certes, je me rappelle la marque mais pour moi elle ne me fait pas tellement envie. L'image que j'ai d'eux est juste tellement négative » (Homme, 27 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine).

L'intégration apparaît, sur la base de l'analyse de nos données, comme la caractéristique qui influence le plus l'attitude envers la marque. Cette dernière sera plutôt positive dans le cas d'un placement cohérent et négative dans le cas d'un placement incohérent. Cet effet est mis en parallèle par nos répondants avec l'image qu'ils ont du vidéaste. S'ils ont une image positive du créateur de contenu et que le produit est bien intégré, cela aura un impact positif sur l'attitude qu'ils ont envers la marque. De même, nos répondants mentionnent la relation susceptible d'associer l'intégration du placement de produit à leur mémorisation de la marque :

« si tu choisis des personnes pas cohérentes avec le produit ça peut être préjudiciable pour l'image de ta marque » (Femme, 23 ans, tous les jours) ;

« c'est-à-dire que si la personne elle est leader dans le domaine et qu'elle présente un produit dans le domaine, on va y accorder notre confiance et ça sera bénéfique pour l'image de la marque » (Femme, 23 ans, tous les jours) ;

« des fois être associé à une marque incohérente, ça peut entraîner des problèmes d'image » (Homme, 18 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine) ;

« par exemple, la chaise de bureau sur laquelle je suis assis, c'est une Secret Lab. J'ai pas inventé la marque tout seul, c'est évident que c'est à force de voir des streamers qui sont assis sur la chaise, avec le coussin derrière avec écrit Secret Lab. Et si je veux une chaise pour jouer aux jeux vidéo, c'est logique que je prenne plutôt celle que les streamers conseillent plutôt que celle recommandée par les influenceurs beauté ou je sais pas quoi parce que les streamers sont plus légitimes et cohérents » (Homme, 35 ans, plusieurs heures par jour).

L'utilisation du produit influence la mémorisation et l'attitude envers la marque. Pour nos répondants, et cela semble apparaître comme une caractéristique distinctive de YouTube par rapport aux médias traditionnels, le placement sera mieux perçu si le vidéaste est lui-même un consommateur régulier du produit présenté. Plus précisément, pour que le placement d'un article produise

As for disclosure, it tends to positively influence attitudes toward the brand. However, if the creator conceals their commercial relationship with the brand, this is often experienced by viewers as a breach of trust. Such a reaction can in turn negatively affect the consumer's perception of the brand:

"sometimes they announce the placement in a funny way, and I think that's great. It even gives me a better image of the brand" (Male, 27, several times a week); *"in that case, she didn't say it was a product placement. And you feel betrayed. It breaks the trust we had in her, and it gives the product a bad image"* (Female, 28, several hours per day).

The impact of product placement characteristics on consumers' behavioral intentions

Respondents are aware of how product placements on YouTube can influence them. Some actively seek product information through the platform before making a purchase decision. Others report having bought a product, or intended to, after watching one or more videos by a content creator. Even when a purchase is not made, viewers may still recommend the product to others, either verbally or via YouTube comments. In all these cases, product integration and demonstrated usage are seen as key drivers of behavioral intention:

"Gaelle talked about that goat milk soap she uses all the time... I quickly wanted to get it. And now I buy it regularly" (Female, 25, daily user);

"if I need to buy a headset tomorrow, I'm not going to choose the one he shows in just one video, but the one he wears every day, eight hours a day" (Male, 29, several hours per day);

"if one of my friends needs a chair to sit in front of their computer, I'll recommend the one that YouTubers use all the time, Secret Lab, because I know they're really good for posture" (Male, 29, several hours per day).

Table 1 provides a summary of the key findings that emerged from our study.

chez les consommateurs des réponses favorables envers sa marque, il ne suffit pas que le créateur de contenu utilise ponctuellement le produit mais qu'il montre, au contraire, qu'il s'en sert régulièrement dans les différentes vidéos qu'il publie. En ce sens, la répétition, plus que la simple utilisation, semble constituer un élément important pour nos répondants :

« quelqu'un qui va être sur une chaise 8h par jour, bah la chaise est bonne, sinon il n'est pas dessus, parce que c'est sa santé, c'est son métier. Donc évidemment que ça donne une bonne image de la marque quand les gens utilisent le produit » (Homme, 29 ans, plusieurs heures pas jours) ;
« il porte régulièrement une paire de Nike, il ne montre pas le placement à outrance, pour moi j'aime bien et je me rappelle que c'est une Jordan One » (Homme, 22 ans, tous les jours).

Concernant la divulgation, cette dernière influence plutôt positivement l'attitude envers la marque. En revanche, si le vidéaste dissimule le lien qui l'unit à l'entreprise, cela sera vécu par certains spectateurs comme une trahison. Ce sentiment négatif aura dès lors un impact négatif sur l'attitude du consommateur vis-à-vis de la marque :

« parfois ils vont annoncer le placement, de façon à faire une blague, et ça, je trouve ça vraiment bien, et ça me donne même une bonne image de la marque » (Homme, 27 ans, plusieurs fois par semaine) ;
« dans ce cas, elle n'avait pas dit que c'était un placement de produit. Et on se sent comme trahis. Ça casse la confiance qu'on avait d'elle, et ça donne une mauvaise image du produit » (Femme, 28 ans, plusieurs heures par jour).

L'impact des caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube sur les intentions comportementales des consommateurs

Nos répondants sont conscients de la manière dont un placement de produit sur YouTube peut les influencer. Certains se rendent sur ce réseau social pour rechercher des informations avant d'acquérir un bien. D'autres achètent le produit, ou en ont l'intention, après avoir visionné une ou plusieurs vidéos d'un créateur de contenu. Même s'ils ne se procurent pas systématiquement l'article, les consommateurs ont tendance à le recommander à leurs proches ou aux utilisateurs de YouTube par l'intermédiaire des commentaires qu'ils y déposent. Dans tous les cas, il semble que l'intégration et l'utilisation du bien soient importantes pour nos répondants :

« *Gaelle a parlé de ce savon au lait de chèvre qu'elle utilise tout le temps...j'ai eu rapidement l'intention de me le procurer. Et aujourd'hui, je l'achète régulièrement* » (Femme, 25 ans, tous les jours) ;
« *moi si demain je dois acheter un casque, je ne vais pas prendre le casque qu'il montre dans une seule vidéo, mais le casque qu'il porte tous les jours, 8h par jour* » (Homme, 29 ans, plusieurs heures par jour) ;
« *demain, si un de mes proches a besoin d'acheter une chaise pour être devant son ordi, je vais lui recommander celle que les youtubeurs utilisent tout le temps, une Secret Lab, parce que je sais qu'elles sont très bonnes pour la posture* » (Homme, 29 ans, plusieurs heures par jour).

Le tableau 1 se propose de récapituler l'ensemble des résultats mis au jour suite à notre étude.

Tableau 1 : Synthèse des résultats obtenus

Caractéristiques	Modalités	Réponses cognitives	Emotions générées	Réponses conatives
Localisation du produit	Visible	Mémorisation de la marque (+) Attitude envers la marque (-)	Irritation Ennervement	
	Discrète	Attitude envers la marque (+)		
Intégration du produit	Cohérente	Mémorisation de la marque (+) Attitude envers la marque (+)	Surprise Amusement	Intention d'achat du produit (+) Intention de recommander le produit (+)
	Incohérente	Attitude envers la marque (-)	Colère Ennervement	
Utilisation du produit	Oui	Mémorisation de la marque (+) Attitude envers la marque (+)		Intention d'achat du produit (+) Intention de recommander le produit (+)
	Non		Ennervement	
Divulgateion du lien avec l'entreprise	Oui	Attitude envers la marque (+)	Joie Amusement	
	Non	Attitude envers la marque (-)	Tristesse Colère Dégoût	

Table 1 : Summary of the key findings

Characteristics	Modalities	Cognitive responses	Emotions	Conative responses
Placement localization	Prominent	Brand recall (+) Brand attitude (-)	Irritation Annoyance	
	Subtle	Brand attitude (+)		
Integration	Coherent	Brand recall (+) Brand attitude (+)	Surprise Amusement	Purchase intention (+) Recommendation intention (+)
	Incoherent	Brand attitude (-)	Anger Annoyance	
Product usage	Yes	Brand recall (+) Brand attitude (+)		Purchase intention (+) Recommendation intention (+)
	No		Annoyance	
Disclosure	Yes	Brand attitude (+)	Joy Amusement	
	No	Brand attitude (-)	Sadness Anger Disgust	

DISCUSSION ET CONCLUSION

L'objectif de cette recherche était de mettre au jour d'éventuelles spécificités liées au placement de produit sur YouTube. Plus précisément, il s'agissait, d'une part, de recenser ses caractéristiques constitutives, d'autre part, de voir dans quelle mesure ces dernières pouvaient potentiellement influencer les réponses cognitives, émotionnelles et conatives des consommateurs. Les résultats obtenus suite à la conduite de 15 entretiens semi-directifs auprès d'utilisateurs de ce réseau social présentent des apports théoriques et managériaux que nous allons maintenant exposer.

D'un point de vue théorique, notre recherche propose trois principales contributions. La première concerne la mise en évidence d'une 4ème caractéristique du placement de produit sur YouTube. Dans le contexte des médias traditionnels, les chercheurs ont traditionnellement mis en avant trois caractéristiques récurrentes : la localisation (Babin et al., 2021), l'intégration (Gupta et Lord, 1998) et l'utilisation (Yang et Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007). Cependant, un placement de produit sur YouTube possède ses propres spécificités, telles que le format UGC (User Generated Content) ou la présence des influenceurs, qui suscitent une forte proximité avec les spectateurs (Ferchaud et al., 2018). Ces particularités entraînent l'apparition d'une 4ème caractéristique qui est très importante sur YouTube pour les spectateurs, à savoir la divulgation ou non du lien qui unit le vidéaste avec l'entreprise qui produit les biens

DISCUSSION ET CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to uncover potential specificities associated with product placement on YouTube. More precisely, it aimed, on the one hand, to identify its constitutive characteristics and, on the other hand, to examine the extent to which these characteristics might influence consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. The results obtained from fifteen semi-structured interviews with users of this platform provide both theoretical and managerial contributions, which we now discuss.

From a theoretical perspective, our study makes three main contributions. The first concerns the identification of a fourth characteristic of product placement on YouTube. In the context of traditional media, previous research has typically emphasized three recurring features: localization (Babin et al., 2021), integration (Gupta & Lord, 1998), and usage (Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007). However, product placement on YouTube presents specificities, such as the User-Generated Content (UGC) format and the presence of influencers, that foster a strong sense of proximity between content creators and their audiences (Ferchaud et al., 2018). These specificities give rise to a fourth characteristic that appears particularly salient for viewers on YouTube: the disclosure, or lack thereof, of the relationship between the content creator and the sponsoring brand. Although some studies have previously addressed the role of disclosure in traditional

présents dans les vidéos. Si quelques recherches ont déjà mis en avant la divulgation explicite d'un placement dans le contexte des médias traditionnels, l'effet sur les réactions des spectateurs semble quasi nul (Matthes et Naderer, 2016). Il n'en est absolument pas de même sur YouTube. Sur ce réseau social, il existe en effet un lien de confiance très fort qui fait que le spectateur attend une certaine forme d'honnêteté de la part du vidéaste. De plus, il est devenu très difficile pour les vidéastes de dissimuler un placement de produit car même si la réglementation est facilement contournable (Eagle et Dahl, 2018), les consommateurs arrivent assez bien à percevoir les tentatives de persuasion des vidéastes (Lee et Kim, 2020). Dès lors, cette recherche a permis de mettre en avant l'importance prise par cette 4ème caractéristique et la nécessité de la prendre systématiquement en compte, en plus des trois autres, lorsqu'il s'agit de fournir une description détaillée et précise de ce qu'est un placement de produit sur YouTube. Un tel résultat vient ainsi enrichir la littérature marketing sur le placement de produit. Par ailleurs, les conclusions de notre étude nous renseignent sur l'existence de relations inédites en recherche susceptibles d'associer cette quatrième dimension à des réponses émotionnelles spécifiques telles que la joie, l'amusement, la tristesse, la colère et le dégoût (voir tableau 1). Plus classiquement, et à l'instar de ce qui avait déjà été démontré dans le cadre des recherches relatives aux 3 premières caractéristiques d'un placement de produit, la divulgation semble pouvoir être associée à l'attitude envers la marque.

La deuxième contribution théorique de ce travail est relative à la mise au jour du rôle des émotions du consommateur dans l'analyse et la compréhension du processus d'influence d'un placement de produit sur YouTube. Jusqu'à présent, dans le cadre des médias traditionnels, les principaux effets de cette technique marketing s'appréhendaient essentiellement à partir de l'attitude envers la marque et de la mémorisation de cette dernière (Babin et al., 2021). Très peu d'attention était accordée aux émotions du consommateur tant leur fonction apparaissait comme mineure dans l'explication de ce processus de persuasion (Guo et al., 2019). Comme le soulignent Da Silva et Ezan (2016), chercheurs et praticiens mettaient principalement l'accent sur l'importance des processus cognitifs afin de rendre compte de la manière dont un placement de produit influençait le comportement des individus. Sur YouTube, il n'est pas envisageable d'opérer de la sorte puisque le placement de produit repose sur un influenceur qui possède une relation de proximité très forte avec le spectateur (Ferchaud et al., 2018). De cette relation de proximité naît un lien émotionnel très intense et nécessaire entre l'individu et le créateur de contenu. Tout élément susceptible de perturber ce lien, comme un influenceur manquant d'empathie (Filali-

media contexts, they report minimal effects on audience responses (Matthes & Naderer, 2016). This is not the case on YouTube. On this platform, a strong trust-based relationship exists between the viewer and the creator, leading to an expectation of transparency. Moreover, while current regulations can be easily bypassed (Eagle & Dahl, 2018), it is increasingly difficult for creators to conceal sponsorships, as viewers are now more capable of identifying persuasive attempts (Lee & Kim, 2020).

Therefore, this study highlights the growing importance of this fourth characteristic and the need to systematically consider it, alongside the other three, when aiming to provide a detailed and accurate description of product placement on YouTube. This result enriches the marketing literature on product placement by extending existing models to better account for social media environments. Furthermore, the findings of our study shed light on previously unexplored relationships by associating this fourth dimension (disclosure) with specific emotional responses such as joy, amusement, sadness, anger, and disgust (see Table 1). More conventionally, and in line with previous studies examining the first three characteristics of product placement, disclosure also appears to influence attitudes toward the brand.

The second theoretical contribution of this research lies in highlighting the role of consumer emotions in the analysis and understanding of the influence mechanisms underlying product placement on YouTube. Until now, within the context of traditional media, the primary effects of this marketing technique were assessed mainly through brand attitude and brand recall (Babin et al., 2021). Consumer emotions were afforded little attention, as their role was considered marginal in explaining persuasion processes (Guo et al., 2019). As Da Silva and Ezan (2016) point out, both researchers and practitioners have primarily emphasized cognitive processes in explaining how product placement affects consumer behavior. On YouTube, however, this perspective becomes insufficient, as product placement operates through influencers who maintain a close and personal connection with their audiences (Ferchaud et al., 2018). This relational proximity fosters a strong emotional bond between the viewer and the content creator. Any element that may disrupt this bond, such as a lack of empathy from the influencer (Filali-Boissy et al., 2024) or a poorly integrated product placement, is likely to trigger an emotional response in the viewer (Avramova et al., 2021). In the context of this research, we identified a wide range of emotional reactions, both positive (e.g., surprise, amusement, joy) and negative (e.g., irritation, anger, disgust, sadness), that can be associated with each of the four dimensions of product placement on YouTube. In this respect, our study contributes to the marketing literature by underscoring the necessity, at least on social media platforms such as YouTube, of

Boissy et al., 2024) ou un placement de produit mal intégré, va entraîner une réponse émotionnelle chez le spectateur (Avramova et al., 2021). Dans le cadre de cette recherche, nous avons été en mesure de répertorier une large palette d'émotions, tantôt positives (surprise, amusement, joie) tantôt négatives (énervement, irritation, colère, dégoût, tristesse), susceptibles d'être associées à chacune des quatre composantes du placement de produit sur YouTube. En ce sens, notre recherche, enrichit la littérature marketing sur le placement de produit en soulignant, dans le cadre du réseau social que nous avons étudié, la nécessité d'intégrer les réponses émotionnelles du spectateur dans toute tentative d'analyse et de compréhension de cette technique de persuasion.

La dernière contribution théorique de notre recherche concerne les réponses cognitives et conatives des spectateurs que nous avons mis au jour à partir de chacune des dimensions d'un placement de produit sur YouTube. A l'instar des médias traditionnels (Russell et Stern, 2006 ; Bressoud et al., 2010 ; Degorre, 2017), il semble que la mémorisation de la marque puisse être associée à la localisation du produit, à son intégration dans la vidéo et à son utilisation (voir tableau 1). Sur ce dernier point, notre étude vient approfondir le travail de El Majoudi et Belvaux (2024) dont les résultats montrent que lorsque l'influenceur déclare avoir déjà utilisé le produit recommandé avant le placement de produit, cela influence favorablement la perception du spectateur. Dans notre cas, l'analyse de nos données semble conforter l'idée selon laquelle la répétition de l'utilisation de l'article, dans plusieurs vidéos du même vidéaste, influence la mémorisation de la marque. Conformément aux médias traditionnels (Avramova et al., 2021 ; Dens et al., 2012 ; Yang et Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007), l'attitude envers la marque est potentiellement liée aux quatre composantes du placement de produit et principalement, dans le cas de YouTube, à l'intégration (voir tableau 1). Comme pour les jeux vidéo, un placement cohérent qui ne perturbe pas l'expérience de visionnage du spectateur entraîne une meilleure attitude vis-à-vis de la marque (Lee et Faber, 2007). Enfin, concernant la mise en évidence des réponses conatives des spectateurs, notre recherche indique qu'un article intégré de manière harmonieuse dans une vidéo et faisant l'objet d'une utilisation par le créateur de contenu est susceptible d'influencer positivement l'intention d'achat et de recommandation du produit. Ce résultat est conforme à ce qui a déjà été démontré dans la littérature avec les médias traditionnels (Da Silva et Ezan, 2016).

Sur le plan managérial, nos résultats renseignent les praticiens sur le fait qu'un placement de produit sur YouTube se compose de quatre caractéristiques, et non pas de trois comme pour les médias traditionnels, qu'il va falloir actionner de manière réfléchie, et non

integrating emotional responses into any attempt to analyze or understand this persuasion strategy.

The final theoretical contribution of our research pertains to the cognitive and conative responses of viewers, which we analyzed in relation to each dimension of product placement on YouTube. Similar to findings from traditional media contexts (Russell & Stern, 2006; Bressoud et al., 2010; Degorre, 2017), brand recall appears to be associated with product prominence, integration, and usage within the video (see Table 1). Regarding the usage dimension, our study builds upon the work of El Majoudi and Belvaux (2024), who found that when an influencer claims to have used a product prior to the partnership, viewers respond more positively. In our case, the analysis of interview data supports the idea that repeated usage of a product by the same content creator across multiple videos positively impacts brand recall. Consistent with the literature on traditional media (Avramova et al., 2021; Dens et al., 2012; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007), brand attitude is potentially influenced by all four dimensions of product placement, with integration emerging as particularly important in the context of YouTube (see Table 1). As is the case for video games, a well-integrated placement that does not disrupt the viewing experience tends to generate a more favorable attitude toward the brand (Lee & Faber, 2007). Finally, in terms of conative responses, our findings suggest that when a product is seamlessly integrated into a video and is used authentically by the content creator, this can positively influence both purchase intention and recommendation behavior. This result aligns with previous findings from the traditional media literature (Da Silva & Ezan, 2016).

From a managerial standpoint, our results indicate that product placement on YouTube comprises four key characteristics, rather than the three typically cited in the context of traditional media. These dimensions must be activated in a deliberate and strategic manner, rather than intuitively, given their distinct influence on viewers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Depending on the specific communication objectives pursued, managers should provide content creators with tailored guidelines regarding how products are presented in their videos. For instance, if the goal of the campaign is to enhance brand recall, the product should appear prominently in the foreground, and the creator should use it repeatedly throughout the video (see Table 1). However, an excessive emphasis on the product may disrupt the viewer's experience and consequently diminish brand attitude. Conversely, if the objective is to foster a more favorable attitude toward the brand, the product should be discreetly featured, coherently integrated into the content, and the creator should clearly disclose their relationship with the brand (see Table 1). In cases where the primary aim is to increase purchase intention, practitioners should

intuitive, compte tenu de leurs effets spécifiques sur les réponses des spectateurs. Selon les objectifs qu'ils assignent à leurs opérations de communication, les managers devront donner des consignes spécifiques aux créateurs de contenus quant à leur manière de présenter les produits dans leurs vidéos. Ainsi, si le but de la campagne est d'améliorer la mémorisation de la marque, le produit devra apparaître de manière visible au premier plan et le vidéaste devra l'utiliser plusieurs fois durant la vidéo (voir tableau 1). Néanmoins une mise en avant trop importante de l'article aura également pour effet de perturber le visionnage du spectateur et ainsi de diminuer son attitude envers la marque. A l'inverse, si l'entreprise souhaite améliorer cette dernière, l'article devra apparaître de façon discrète, être intégré de manière cohérente à l'œuvre et le vidéaste devra annoncer clairement aux internautes la relation qui le lie à la marque (voir tableau 1). Dans le cas où l'objectif de la campagne est d'augmenter l'intention d'achat de la marque, les praticiens devront veiller à ce que le produit exposé soit en adéquation avec le contenu de la vidéo et à ce que le créateur de contenus soit connu pour le consommer régulièrement (voir tableau 1).

Nos résultats renseignent également les praticiens sur les caractéristiques du placement de produit qu'il convient d'actionner afin de générer des émotions spécifiques chez les spectateurs. D'une manière générale, les managers doivent chercher à susciter des émotions positives et à éviter l'apparition d'émotions négatives durant la présentation des articles par les créateurs de contenus. En opérant de la sorte, ils souhaitent offrir aux consommateurs une expérience d'exposition aux vidéos plaisante pouvant potentiellement favoriser la mémorisation de la marque. Cette proposition de gratifications hédoniques constitue une source de valeur pour le spectateur qui est susceptible de s'attacher à la marque et d'y être fidèle. Elle est également une source de valeur pour l'entreprise qui peut utiliser la diffusion de ces gratifications émotionnelles comme un outil de différenciation par rapport aux œuvres des vidéastes qui valorisent des articles concurrents aux siens. D'une manière générale, nos résultats sont susceptibles d'aider les praticiens dans la mise en œuvre de stratégies de positionnement expérientiel pour les vidéos des créateurs de contenus avec qui ils travaillent. Ainsi, un placement de produit générant de la surprise, de l'amusement et de la joie s'obtiendra par une intégration cohérente du produit à la vidéo et par une divulgation claire de la relation qui unit le vidéaste à l'entreprise (voir tableau 1). A l'inverse, il conviendra d'éviter de proposer un placement de produit où l'article est trop présent, mal intégré au contenu de la vidéo et non utilisé par le vidéaste qui ne fait pas allusion de manière explicite au lien qui le relie à la firme. Dans ce cas, en effet, toutes les conditions seront réunies pour que le placement soit assimilé à une publicité qui trahit

ensure that the featured product aligns with the content of the video and that the content creator is perceived as a regular user of the product (see Table 1).

Our findings also inform practitioners about which product placement characteristics are likely to elicit specific emotional responses from viewers. In general, managers should seek to generate positive emotions and avoid triggering negative ones during product placements. Doing so enhances the viewer experience, potentially increasing brand recall and fostering positive emotional associations with the brand. This hedonic value creates a stronger bond between the viewer and the brand, potentially promoting brand attachment and loyalty. Furthermore, offering such emotionally rewarding experiences through product placement can serve as a competitive advantage, helping distinguish a brand from competitors featured in other creators' videos. More broadly, our results may assist practitioners in developing experiential positioning strategies for the content produced in collaboration with YouTubers. For example, a product placement that generates surprise, amusement, or joy can be achieved by coherently integrating the product into the video and transparently disclosing the influencer-brand relationship (see Table 1). In contrast, practitioners should avoid placements where the product is overly visible, poorly integrated, not used by the creator, and where the brand relationship is concealed. Under such conditions, the placement may be perceived as deceptive advertising, leading viewers to experience a range of negative emotions (e.g., anger, irritation, annoyance, disgust, and sadness) (see Table 1).

The conclusions reached in this study must be interpreted with caution, primarily due to its exploratory nature and, consequently, its limited external validity. As a reminder, the objective of this research was to investigate the specific features of product placement on YouTube, both in terms of novel constitutive characteristics, notably the fourth dimension related to disclosure, and in the identification of new relationships between these dimensions and consumers' cognitive, emotional, and conative responses. In order to confirm the relationships proposed in Table 1, future research should employ experimental designs to assess how each modality of the different product placement dimensions impacts viewer reactions. These confirmatory quantitative studies will also make it possible to test the relationships identified across various sectors (e.g., sports, food, culture, etc.) to uncover potential domain-specific effects. Another limitation of this study lies in its exclusive focus on YouTube. However, product placement is widely used on other social media platforms, which merit attention in future research. Recent studies have already begun to explore platforms such as Instagram (Bouyahia & Ben Miled-Cherif, 2022), Facebook (Van den Broeck et al., 2018), and TikTok (Yang et al., 2024). Expanding the

la confiance des spectateurs et pour que ces derniers éprouvent une multitude d'émotions négatives (colère, irritation, énervement, dégoût et tristesse) (voir tableau 1).

Les conclusions auxquelles nous parvenons dans cette recherche méritent d'être relativisées compte tenu, tout d'abord de son caractère exploratoire et, par conséquent, de sa validité externe limitée. Pour rappel, l'objectif de ce travail était de s'intéresser aux spécificités d'un placement de produit sur YouTube tant en terme de caractéristiques constitutives inédites (la quatrième dimension liée à la divulgation) que de mise en évidence de relations nouvelles entre ces dernières et les réponses cognitives, émotionnelles et conatives des consommateurs. Dans le but de confirmer les relations supposées dans le tableau 1, il conviendra, à l'avenir, de conduire plusieurs expérimentations afin d'apprécier comment chaque modalité de chaque dimension du placement de produit affecte les réactions des spectateurs. Par l'intermédiaire de ces futures études quantitatives confirmatoires, il sera également possible de tester les différentes relations mises au jour dans des secteurs différents (sport, alimentation, culture, etc.) afin de déceler d'éventuelles spécificités liées à certains domaines d'activité. Une autre limite de cette recherche trouve son origine dans sa focalisation sur YouTube. Le placement de produit est naturellement présent sur d'autres réseaux sociaux auxquels il conviendrait de s'intéresser dans un futur proche. De récents travaux ont en effet vu le jour en ce qui concerne Instagram (Bouyahia et Ben Miled-Cherif, 2022), Facebook (Van den Broeck et al., 2018) ou encore TikTok (Yang et al., 2024). L'élargissement du nombre de réseaux sociaux investigués à l'intérieur de mêmes études pourrait déboucher sur des approches comparatives quant aux conséquences du placement de produit sur les internautes. Enfin, nous avons restreint notre recherche à une technique spécifique du marketing d'influence, à savoir le placement de produit. Des méthodes relativement similaires sont également pratiquées sur les réseaux sociaux telles que le sponsoring, la publicité intégrée, le partenariat, les jeux concours et l'endossement (Tanwar et al., 2022). Il pourrait être utile, tant pour les chercheurs que pour les praticiens, d'entreprendre une analyse de leurs ressemblances ou de leurs différences en terme d'efficacité marketing.

scope of inquiry to include multiple platforms within a single study may allow for comparative analyses of how product placement affects online users across different social media environments. Finally, our study centered on a specific technique within influencer marketing, namely product placement. However, other similar practices exist on social platforms, including sponsorships, native advertising, brand partnerships, giveaways, and endorsements (Tanwar et al., 2022). A deeper examination of the similarities and differences between these techniques, particularly in terms of marketing effectiveness, would be highly valuable for both scholars and practitioners.

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ANNEXE / APPENDIXES

Annexe 1

Les questions du guide d'entretien ayant fait l'objet de l'analyse de contenu

Thème 1 : Perception d'un placement de produit sur YouTube par les spectateurs

- Quelles sont, selon vous, les caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube ?
- Comment percevez-vous chacune de ces caractéristiques lorsque vous regardez une vidéo sur YouTube ?

Thème 2 : Les réponses des spectateurs face à un placement de produit sur YouTube

- Dans quelle mesure un placement de produit sur YouTube vous influence-t-il ?
- Quelles influences les caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube ont-elles sur vous ?
- Quelles émotions ressentez-vous face à un placement de produit sur YouTube ?
- Quelles émotions ressentez-vous face à chacune des caractéristiques d'un placement de produit sur YouTube ?

Appendix 1.

Interview guide questions used for content analysis

Theme 1: Viewers' perception of product placement on YouTube

- In your opinion, what are the defining characteristics of product placement on YouTube?
- How do you perceive each of these characteristics when watching a YouTube video?

Theme 2: Viewers' responses to product placement on YouTube

- To what extent does product placement on YouTube influence you?
- How do the specific characteristics of product placement on YouTube affect you?
- What emotions do you experience in response to product placement on YouTube?
- What emotions do you associate with each individual characteristic of product placement on YouTube?

Annexe 2**L'échantillon de la recherche**

	Genre	Age	Région	Profession	Support	Fréquence	Contenu
1	H	22	Paris	Etudiant	Ordinateur	Tous les jours	Emission TV/Musique/Sport/ Divertissement
2	F	18	Paris	Etudiant	Ordinateur / Téléphone	Plusieurs heures par jour	Cinéma/Musique/ Beauté/ Divertissement
3	F	23	Province	Ouvrier	Ordinateur / Téléphone / Télévision	Tous les jours	Sport/Divertissement/ Beauté
4	F	23	Paris	Etudiant	Téléphone	Tous les jours	Musique/Sport/ Cinéma/Beauté
5	H	28	Province	Cadre	Ordinateur / Téléphone	Plusieurs heures par jour	Divertissement/ Cinéma/Histoire Jeux vidéos
6	H	18	Province	Etudiant	Ordinateur / Téléphone	Plusieurs fois par semaine	Musique/ Divertissement
7	F	24	Province	Salarié	Téléphone	Tous les jours	Musique/ Divertissement
8	H	35	Province	Professeur	Ordinateur	Plusieurs fois par semaine	Musique/ Divertissement/Jeux vidéos
9	H	29	Paris	Consultant	Ordinateur / Téléphone / Télévision	Plusieurs heures par jour	Divertissement/ Jeux vidéos
10	H	24	Province	Salarié	Ordinateur / Téléphone / Télévision	Tous les jours	Divertissement/ Actualité/ Jeux vidéos
11	F	25	Province	Chef de produit	Ordinateur / Téléphone	Tous les jours	Musique/Beauté/ Divertissement/ Jeux vidéos
12	F	23	Paris	Ouvrier	Ordinateur / Téléphone	Plusieurs fois par semaine	Divertissement/ Musique/ Beauté
13	H	27	Province	Cadre	Ordinateur / Téléphone	Plusieurs fois par semaine	Musique/Histoire/ Jeux vidéos/Science
14	H	35	Paris	Cadre	Ordinateur / Téléphone	Plusieurs heures par jour	Musique/Actualité/ Jeux vidéos
15	F	28	Paris	Entrepreneur	Ordinateur / Téléphone	Plusieurs heures par jour	Divertissement/ Actualité/ Emission TV/

Appendix 2.**Research sample**

	Gender	Age	Région	Occupation	Device	Frequency	Content
1	H	22	Paris	Student	Computer	Every day	TV Shows / Music / Sports / Entertainment
2	F	18	Paris	Student	Computer / Phone	Several hours per day	Cinema / Music / Beauty / Entertainment
3	F	23	Other region	Worker	Computer / Phone / Television	Every day	Sports / Entertainment / Beauty
4	F	23	Paris	Student	Phone	Every day	Music / Sports / Cinema / Beauty
5	H	28	Other region	Manager	Computer / Phone	Several hours per day	Entertainment / Cinema / History / Video Games
6	H	18	Other region	Student	Computer / Phone	Several times a week	Music / Entertainment
7	F	24	Other region	Employee	Phone	Every day	Music / Entertainment
8	H	35	Other region	Professor	Computer	Several times a week	<i>Music / Entertainment / Video Games</i>
9	H	29	Paris	Consultant	Computer / Phone / Television	Several hours per day	Entertainment / Video Games
10	H	24	Other region	Employee	Computer / Phone / Television	Every day	Entertainment / News / Video Games
11	F	25	Other region	Brand manager	Computer / Phone	Every day	Music / Beauty / Entertainment / Video Games
12	F	23	Paris	Worker	Computer / Phone	Several times a week	Entertainment / Music / Beauty
13	H	27	Other region	Manager	Computer / Phone	Several times a week	Music / History / Video Games / Science
14	H	35	Paris	Manager	Computer / Phone	Several hours per day	Music / News / Video Games
15	F	28	Paris	Entrepreneur	Computer / Phone	Several hours per day	Entertainment / News / TV Shows

Enhancing the shopping well-being: the role of in-store digital tools

Abstract :

The studies on in-store technology use have not sufficiently explored its potential impact on customer shopping well-being. The self-determination theory and shopping value literature allow us to investigate how using these tools affects shopping well-being across shopping value. This research also presents the direct influences of psychological needs such as autonomy and competence on shopping well-being, as well as their moderating influences in the shopping “value - well-being» relationship. Results show that using a digital tool increases the hedonic value, thereby increasing shopping well-being. But this use does not increase the perception of utilitarian value, which has no impact on shopping well-being. In the second study, however, the addition of projection in the use of digital tools modifies this effect. In both studies, shopping well-being is directly enhanced by perceptions of competence and autonomy with regard to digital tools use.

Key words: *digital tool, shopping well-being, shopping value, competence, autonomy.*

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INTRODUCTION

A variety of technologies are used by retailers in their stores, such as smart screens, selfcheckout counters, apps and robots (Grewal et al. 2023). Retailers are also re-considering their offers, processes and interfaces to enhance value through multiple interactions, similar to the digitalized interactive platform exemplified by the Apple store (Roy et al. 2023). These technologies influence the shopper experience (Lao, Vlad and Martin 2021; Flacandji and Vlad 2022) and make retail environments increasingly sophisticated, with shopping frequently blurring transactional, social and leisure boundaries for the consumer (Maggioni et al. 2019). In-store technology can be seen as an artefact that fosters a “hybrid interaction” between physical and virtual worlds, adding further complexity (Roten and Vanheems 2019) and paradoxical perceptions concerning the customer autonomy (Roten and Vanheems 2024).

Value creation and the quality of the customer experience are important consequences, but another strategic challenge in retail that needs to be monitored in an increasingly competitive environment is shopping well-being (El-Hedhli, Zourrig and Chebat 2016). Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar (2020) advocate for further research on the impact of new technologies on well-being and psychological needs like autonomy. The general use of retail technologies while shopping can fulfill psychological needs for autonomy and competence (Leung and Matanda 2013), potentially leading to an increase in shopping well-being.

Few studies have explored the potential of retail experiences to improve customer well-being (Ali, Mishra and Javed 2021; El Hedhli, Chebat and Sirgy 2013, El Hedhli, Zourrig and Chebat 2016; Gardiazabal, Bianchi and Saleh 2020; Grzeskowiak et al. 2016; Maggioni et al. 2019). In addition, this prior research has mainly considered contexts such as shopping centers, overlooking the impact of in-store technologies use on well-being. Previous research on the impact of technology use on well-being mainly focused on life satisfaction (Linnhoff and Smith 2017), customer well-being (Garrouch and Ghali 2023) or subjective well-being (Roy et al. 2023), rather than specifically addressing shopping well-being. Shopping well-being captures the emotional state of life satisfaction consumers may experience while shopping (El Hedhli, Chebat and Sirgy 2013). To address these research gaps, the present study aims to (1) investigate how in-store technology use affects customer well-being across different dimensions of shopping value and (2) investigate whether general perceived autonomy and competence when using digital tools enhance these effects and shopping well-being.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Shopping well-being

Consumption and shopping experiences can make people happy and induce subjective wellbeing if they lead to positive emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Ekici et al. 2018 ; Guevara and Howell 2015). Subjective well-being is frequently defined as a positive affect, leading to greater life satisfaction (Purohit, Arora and Paul 2022). It is considered as a relatively stable cognitive orientation towards life (Ryan and Deci 2001) and has been extended recently by El Hedhli, Chebat and Sirgy (2013) to shopping well-being. Shopping well-being stems from experiences linked to a shopping experience and is defined as “a shopper’s perceived impact of a shopping mall in contributing to satisfaction in important life domains (such as consumer life, social life, leisure life, and community life) resulting in a global judgement that the mall contributes significantly to one’s overall quality of life” (El Hedhli, Chebat and Sirgy 2013, p. 857). For Sirgy et al. (2016), shopping well-being is “*the degree to which consumers perceive that shopping contributes to their overall life satisfaction*”. The latter authors have a more hedonic conception of shopping well-being than El Hedhli, Chebat and Sirgy (2013) and we adopt this conception of the shopping well-being. Previous research has identified several antecedents of shopping well-being, including mall image (Shafiee and Es-Haghi 2017), functional, convenience, safety, leisure, atmospherics and self-related factors (El Hedhli, Chebat and Sirgy 2013), self-congruity (El Hedhli et al. 2021) and shopping experience dimensions (Maggioni et al. 2019). Shopping value is another important antecedent of shopping well-being (El Hedhli, Zourrig and Chebat 2016) but findings concerning its effects on shopping well-being are inconsistent, especially when the analysis focuses on utilitarian value dimension.

Shopping value and its effects on well-being

In the brand-consumer relationship chain, overall perceived value plays a fundamental role (Aurier, Benavent and N’Goala 2001). By reflecting the consumer’s evolving experiences with a product or service, perceived value moves beyond the transactional focus of concepts like satisfaction to adopt a relational orientation of the interaction (Filser 2007). Shopping value results from the interaction between the consumer and the shopping environment and can be evaluated through two main dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic value (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Jones, Reynolds and Arnold

2006; Mencarelli and Rivière 2020). Social dimension of shopping value or consumption value through social ties (Aurier, Evrard and N'Goala 2004) is sometimes considered but the main dimensions of shopping value are utilitarian and hedonic even in an omnichannel context as confirmed by Picot-Coupey et al. (2021).

Utilitarian value refers to functional benefits of the shopping (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) and involves the fulfillment of the functional expectations' consumers may have for a product or service. Hedonic value helps to fulfill fantasies and provides a sense of fun during the purchase process rather than simply buying for its own sake (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). The hedonic shopping value which stems especially from the enjoyment and pleasure that a shopper experiences during his shopping activities has a positive effect on shopping well-being (El Hedhli, Zourrig and Chebat 2016; Shafiee and Es-Haghi 2017; Ali, Mishra and Javed 2021). This result is in line with the conclusions of research on the positive link between hedonic consumption and subjective well-being (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Gilovich, Kumar and Jampol 2015). The utilitarian shopping value seems to have no significant impact on shopping well-being (El Hedhli, Zourrig and Chebat 2016; Shafiee and Es-Haghi 2017; Ali, Mishra and Javed 2021). However, these previous studies did not consider the in-store technology use which has an important impact on utilitarian shopping value (Flacandji and Vlad 2022; Lao, Vlad and Martin 2021; Adapa et al. 2020). The in-store technology provides access to a wide range of information, stimulates the consumer (Grewal et al. 2023; Muratore and Nannipieri 2023) and increases the utilitarian value thanks to the cognitive dimension of the experience (Goudey 2013; Muratore and Nannipieri 2023). Antéblan, Filser and Roederer (2013) speak of directed self-production, where the consumer plays an active role and this instrumental form of participation in the shopping experience is a source of utility and functional value. Lao, Vlad and Martin (2021) studied precisely the in-store digital kiosk use and show that the pragmatic, cognitive, and sensorial dimensions of experience significantly influence utilitarian value.

Other technologies used in-store like apps can provide customers with new capabilities (Dacko 2017) enhancing their in-store shopping experience (Molinillo et al. 2020) and both utilitarian and hedonic shopping value (Flacandji and Vlad 2022). Considering that Maggioni et al. (2019) prove the positive impact of both utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of the shopping experience in commercial centers on well-being, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Digital tools use during the shopping experience has a positive effect on perceived (a) utilitarian value and (b) hedonic value, compared to non-use

H2: Perceived (a) utilitarian value and (b) hedonic value have positive effects on shopping well-being

Technology use and psychological need satisfaction

Self-determination theory (SDT) states that subjective well-being is experienced when the innate basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are fulfilled (Deci and Ryan 1985; Ryan and Deci 2008). If shopping experiences satisfy these psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they can make people happy and induce subjective well-being (Guevara and Howell 2015). In the shopping context, autonomy is the consumers' conscious or unconscious impression of freedom and the perception of control over the shopping process (Shen, Wan and Li 2023). Since digital tools in-store are specifically designed to offer a convenient shopping experience and to facilitate the buying of products or services, we suppose their features will foster consumer autonomy. Technological features like connectivity, personalization, controllability, and responsiveness can improve consumers' independent choices and autonomy (Shen, Wan and Li 2023). Shoppers may feel empowered and more in control of their choices and decisions (Bachouche and Sabri 2019). In the context of mobile payment apps, Zhang et al. (2022) observed that when users reach a high level of need satisfaction using an app, it boosts their confidence in their own autonomy. On the other hand, the freedom these technologies provide can also lead to feelings of overwhelm due to the complexity of decisions or the broad range of options available (Markus and Schwartz 2010).

Competence refers to a person's need for feelings of effectiveness, achievement, and challenge (Deci and Ryan 2000). Since in-store technologies like retail apps offer access to additional information, enabling customers to make more informed and confident choices (Fuentes, Bäckström and Svingsted 2017), their use can enhance consumer competence (Flacandji, Vlad and Lunardo 2024; Japutra, Higuera-Castillo and Liebana-Cabanillas 2022). To our knowledge, only Flacandji, Vlad and Lunardo (2024) have examined satisfaction of the psychological needs for autonomy and competence as specific antecedents of shopping wellbeing in the in-store shopping experience with app use, showing a positive relation only between competence and well-being. However, these authors' approach is contextualized to a particular store and technology, whereas this research opts for a general perception of the use of digital tools. Nevertheless, this positive relationship between autonomy, competence and subjective well-being has been supported in various contexts related to digitalized experience, such as online retail (Shen, Wan and Li 2023) or AI-enabled technologies (Andre et al. 2018). Considering that autonomy and competence are the psychological needs with the greatest influence on well-being (Deci and Ryan 2000), we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: Perceived autonomy with regard to digital tools increases shopping well-being

H4: Perceived competence with regard to digital tools increases shopping wellbeing

Moderating role of autonomy, competence and projective use of technology

The variation in consumer differences arising from personality traits is of greatest interest in attitude formation and behavioral intentions (Dabholkar and Bagozzi 2002). It is important to understand the role of consumer-specific characteristics in shaping well-being, as recognized by the literature focusing on personality factors and subjective well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001). These characteristics are also recognized as moderators that interact with customer experience in relation to behavioral outcomes (Verhoef et al. 2009). In the context of self-service technologies, the self-efficacy or the sense of self-confidence in one's ability to do something makes consumers look on that activity as fun and to improve the enjoyment of the technology use (Dabholkar and Bagozzi 2002). We can therefore assume that perceptions of general competence and autonomy with regard to digital tools play a moderating role in the relationship between the shopping value and shopping well-being :

H5: Perceived autonomy reinforces the effect of (a) utilitarian and (b) hedonic value on shopping well-being

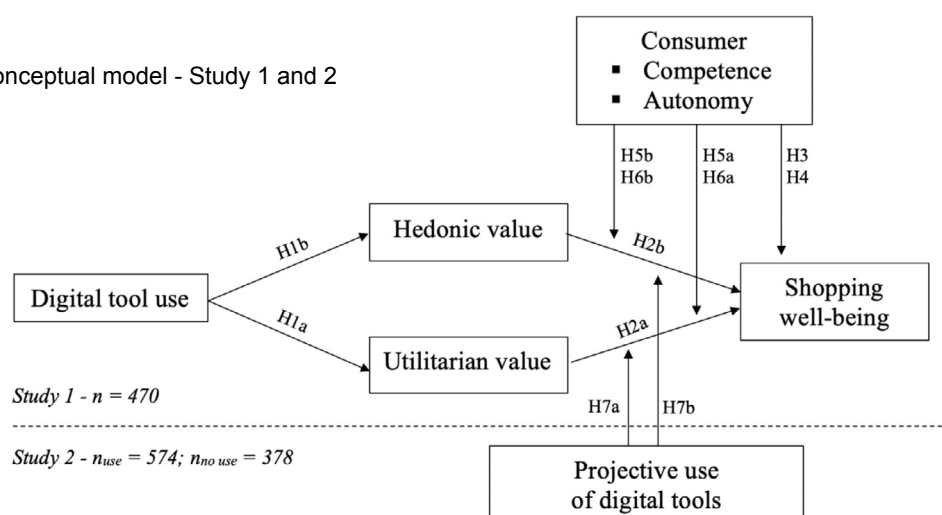
H6: Perceived competence reinforces the effect of (a) utilitarian and (b) hedonic value on shopping well-being

Regardless of these individual characteristics, facilitating and helping the consumer to project themselves into a digital tool use can also improve their evaluation or encourage their adoption. Projection incorporates the concept of mental imagery, where a mental image is a mental representation of one or more entities corresponding (or not) to reality and is part of a cognitive process that occurs in the absence of the stimuli that triggered the corresponding perceptions (Lao 2010, 2013). The generated mental images, also called imagination images, thus come from conscious mental activity in the individual. In the context of our research, they come from an instruction given in the scenario, and highlight a projection of a possible future use of a technology (Lao 2010, 2013), which is equivalent to imagining oneself using a digital tool.

Soley (2010) argues that projective techniques are reliable and exhibit greater predictive validity than many positivist instruments. Thus, utilitarian or hedonic values have a significant influence on shopping experiences involving the use of technology (Childers et al. 2002; Fiore, Kim and Lee 2005). And according to Jarrier (2015), an individual can experience moments of enjoyment or micro-immersions in the experience, leading to a wide variety of benefits (Carù and Cova 2003, 2006) such as a sense of well-being (Kaplan 1995; Packer 2008). Thus, we assume that the projective use of a digital tool in store can moderate the effects of value on well-being. Specifically, in the absence of the actual use of the digital tool but rather within the context of an individual's projection of its use, we wish to study the moderating influence of this projected use on the "value – well-being" relationship. Thus, we propose hypothesis 7:

H7: The projective use of digital tools enhances the effects of perceived (a) utilitarian and (b) hedonic value on shopping well-being

Figure 1. Conceptual model - Study 1 and 2



STUDY 1

The first study tests our basic prediction that using digital tools during shopping (as opposed to not using them) increases shopping value, which in turn improves shopping well-being. Customers' general levels of perceived autonomy and competence with digital tools are likely to enhance this well-being, as are the effects of value on this well-being.

Procedure and measures

The data collected comes from 470 participants (Appendix A) in an online survey about a recent shopping experience. A total of 489 French consumers took part but we excluded 19 participants for failing the attention checks². In this first study, 60.2% of respondents are women and 39.8% are men. Among the 470 respondents, 226 (48%) have already used digital tools in physical non-food stores (digital kiosks, digital screen, connected cabin, excluding automatic checkouts) while 244 say not.

For all constructs, items were adopted from well-established measures (Appendix B).

Utilitarian value was measured with two items and hedonic value with three items adapted from

Picot-Coupey et al. (2021) who recently validated the seminal scale of Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994) in the context of omnichannel retailing. Shopping well-being was measured with 4 items adapted from past studies of Nicolao, Irwin and Goodman (2009) and Sirgy et al. (2016). Autonomy and competence were captured using respectively four and five items adapted from Thomson (2006). All 7-point Likert items were anchored with 1 - "Do not agree at all" and 7 - "Fully agree" and were found to be reliable. The reliability of the measurements is confirmed because the values of Jöreskog's R^2 vary between 0.821 and 0.917. Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE) score. Like the previous reliability indicator, these statistics were calculated on Amos. Convergent validity is confirmed if the AVE score is above the threshold of 0.50. As shown in Table 1, the minimum AVE is 0.64. The square root of the minimum average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct (0.799) being greater than the maximum correlation (0.771) between the constructs of the model, the discriminant validity of the measures is also verified (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Mean comparison tests allow us to control the levels declared on individual variables. The statistics, produced using SPSS, show that the levels of autonomy ($t=3.900$; $p<.01$) and competence ($t=3.039$; $p<.01$) are perceived as higher if the respondents have already used a digital tool in a non-food physical store than if they have never used one.

For hypothesis testing, the PROCESS 4 model, implemented on SPSS, is used to explore the potential mediating role of utilitarian value and hedonic value in the relationship between the use or non-use of digital tools in a physical store and associated well-being. Model 14 extends this mediation analysis by further testing the direct influences of competence and autonomy and their moderating effects on the relationships posited between values and shopping wellbeing (Table 2). Hayes, Montoya and Rockwood' (2017) PROCESS procedure uses regressions to make its estimates. PROCESS 4 analyzes the mediation of a variable between an independent variable and the dependent variable. PROCESS 14 adds to these relationships the test of a moderator variable in the relationship between the mediator variable and the dependent variable.

Although "composite" SEM methods overcome some of the disadvantages of structural equations (Sarstedt et al., 2020). Hayes, Montoya and Rockwood (2017) point out that the PROCESS procedure allows better estimation of interaction terms and fewer requirements on sample sizes. Even if PROCESS presents a dilution of the measurement error, for a simple model as here, i.e. applied to a single dependent variable imposed by the use of the macro of Hayes, Montoya and Rockwood (2017), this method is particularly well adapted. For more complex models, the use of SEM would be more relevant. Finally, as Borau et al. (2015) point out, thanks to bootstrapping, PROCESS is less sensitive to deviations from the conditions of normality of the distributions and linearity of the effects tested. The method also has the advantage of directly testing the significance of indirect effects at different values of the moderator variable.

Results

The correlation with well-being is insignificant for utilitarian value, whereas it is significant ($p<.01$) with hedonic value (Table 1).

² In the middle of the survey, among the mixed items designed to assess individual competence and autonomy, the following statement was introduced: "Check 2 if you read this question". Respondents who failed to tick box 2 on the Likert scale were deleted from the response file.

Table 1. Correlations between model variables - Study 1

	Shopping well-being	Utilitarian value	Hedonic value	Competence	Autonomy
Shopping well-being	.857				
Utilitarian value	-.070	.840			
Hedonic value	.771**	-.042	.799		
Competence	.416**	.109*	.326**	.802	
Autonomy	.488**	.030	.415**	.751**	.819

The values of the extracted mean variance roots are presented on the diagonal.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test).

First of all, the results show a direct effect of the prior use of digital tools on shopping wellbeing. They also show that utilitarian value is not influenced by the use of digital tools, and has no effect on well-being. On the other hand, hedonic value is positively influenced by the use of digital tools ($b=.290$; $p<.01$), and this value reinforces well-being ($b=.678$; $p<.01$). The mediation of hedonic value in the relationship between usage and well-being also appears to be significant ($b=0.1966$; CI 95% [.0723; .3249]). These initial results validate the H1b and H2b hypotheses for hedonic value, and reject the H1a and H2a hypotheses associated with utilitarian value.

Table 2. Effects on shopping well-being: mediation and moderation analyses - Study 1

Model 4					<i>Mediator : Utilitarian Value</i>			<i>Mediator : Hedonic Value</i>																			
Dependent variable		Utilitarian Value		Hedonic Value		Well-being			Well-being																		
Digital tool use		-.072		.290**		.414**			.221**																		
Mediator : Utilitarian Value						-.057			-																		
Mediator : Hedonic Value						-			.678**																		
F		.076		10.0556**		11.481**			227.632**																		
R ²		.001		.021		.047			.494																		
						Indirect Effects – CI 95%																					
		Effect		Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI		Effect		Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI															
		Mediator				.0041		-.0083		.0246		.1966		.0723		.3249											
Model 14		<i>Moderator : Autonomy</i>						<i>Moderator : Competence</i>																			
Dependent variable		Well-being			Well-being			Well-being			Well-being																
Digital tool use		.261**			.187**			.307**			.187**																
Utilitarian Value		-.076			-			-.094			-																
Moderator		.416**			.171**			.370**			.183**																
Utilitarian Value X Moderator		.050			-			.104**			-																
Hedonic Value					.605**						.623**																
Hedonic Value X Moderator					-.039						-.009																
F		32.850**			131.105**			28.679**			127.753**																
R ²		.220			.530			.198			.524																
		Indirect Effects – CI 95%																									
<i>Autonomy</i>		Effect		Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI		Effect		Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI		Effect		Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI									
<i>Competence</i>																											
-1.1490		-1.2516		.0096		-.0154		.0439		.1882		.0720		.3087		.0161		-.0251		.0647		.184		.0663		.3092	
.1418		.0781		.0050		-.0078		.0256		.1737		.0639		.2877		.0062		-.0094		.0299		.181		.0657		.3024	
1.1003		1.0039		.0015		-.0103		.0197		.1630		.0586		.2826		-.0007		-.0165		.0162		.178		.0644		.2993	
Conditional effects of utilitarian value at values of competence		-1.2516														-.224**		-.3474		-.1002							
		.0781														-.086*		-.1684		-.0041							
		1.0039														.010		-.0996		.1187							

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; (two-tailed test)

The results then show that general perceptions of autonomy and competence associated with the use of digital tools increase perceptions of shopping well-being, validating hypotheses H3 and H4 respectively. Mediations of hedonic value are maintained irrespective of perceived levels of autonomy and competence. Moderated mediation indexes do not show significant values. Moderation analyses show that only one interaction appears: that between competence and utilitarian value ($b=0.104$; $p<.01$). The conditional effects analysis shows that when the individual feels competent, there is no effect of utilitarian value on well-being, but when he or she feels little or no competence, utilitarian value reduces well-being.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, considering the low rate of digital tool use, we first attempt to replicate the results observed in Study 1 in a scenario-based experiment. We then examine how the use projection of the digital tool affects relations between shopping value and shopping well-being always considering general autonomy and competence, in order to test H7.

Procedure, design and measures

A scenario-based between-subjects experiment with 2 conditions (projection in the use of digital tools; non-projection in the use) was here used in the second study. Two photos of digital tool in store were shown with the following instructions: *"imagine that the store where you bought your last non-food product offers you a digital terminal or a digital screen allowing you to have information on products, find inspiration, consult the opinions of other customers, order a product out of stock, etc"*. In the scenario of projection in the use of the tool, participants were then told to imagine that they were going to use the digital tool during the in-store visit. In the scenario of projection in the non-use of the tool, the respondents were invited to answer the questions based on their actual shopping experience without digital tool use. 20 respondents for the first scenario (projection in use) and 14 for the second scenario (non-projection in use) were eliminated because they failed the attention checks, leading to a total sample of 952 individuals, 574 and 378, respectively. In this second study, the statistics are very close to study 1 (Appendix A) because 59.9% of respondents are women, 40.1% are men and 52.6% are students. The product categories associated with the store in the study are also very varied. Finally, the most used digital tools are also digital terminals and touch screens.

For this study 2, among the 952 respondents, 550 (58%) have already used these digital tools and 402 respond that they have not. Here again, the statistics show that the levels of autonomy ($t=3.310$; $p<.01$) and competence ($t=4.471$; $p<.01$) are perceived as higher if the respondents have already used a digital tool in a non-food physical store than if they have never used one. The measures were the same as in Study 1 and value and well-being measures have been adapted in the future tense. Reliability and validity indicators are also validated.

Results

As in Study 1, the correlation with well-being is not significant for utilitarian value while it is significant ($p<.01$) with hedonic value (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlations between model variables - Study 2

	Shopping well-being	Utilitarian value	Hedonic value	Competence	Autonomy
Shopping well-being	.873				
Utilitarian value	.061	.843			
Hedonic value	.709**	.083*	.780		
Competence	.547**	.167**	.530**	.838	
Autonomy	.580**	.151**	.489**	.773**	.847

The values of the extracted mean variance roots are presented on the diagonal.

** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.05$ (two-tailed test)

Results indicate that utilitarian value is not influenced by the use of digital tools and that it does not affect well-being (Table 4). Hedonic value is positively influenced by the use of digital tools ($b=.130$; $p<.05$) and this value reinforces well-being ($b=.621$; $p<.01$). The mediation of hedonic value in the relationship between use and well-being is significant at the threshold of $p<.10$ when the sample is considered in its entirety. These results, allow us to validate hypothesis H1b and H2b for hedonic value and to reject hypothesis H1a and H2a associated with utilitarian value.

Table 4. Effects on shopping well-being: mediation and moderation analyses - Study 2

Model 4					Mediator : Utilitarian Value			Mediator : Hedonic Value		
Dependent variable		Utilitarian Value		Hedonic Value	Well-being			Well-being		
Digital tool use		-.005		.130*	-.045			-.036		
Mediator : Utilitarian Value					.070			-		
Mediator : Hedonic Value					-			.621**		
F		.0059		3.9493*	2.597			296.5448**		
R ²		.000		.006	.005			.385		
					Indirect Effects – CI 95%					
					Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
		Mediator			-.0004	-.0110	.0116	.0809	-.0004	.1612
					Indirect Effects – CI 90%					
		Mediator			-.0004	-.0085	.0086	.0809	.0121	.1501

Model 14		Moderator : Projection into use							
Dependent variable		Well-being				Well-being			
Digital tool use		.043				-.043			
Utilitarian Value		-.035				-			
Moderator		-.064				.114**			
Utilitarian Value X Moderator		.172**				-			
Hedonic Value						.668**			
Hedonic Value X Moderator						-.060			
F		3.229*				151.376**			
R ²		.013				.390			
		Projection		Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
		No use		.0002	-.0089	.0106	.0870	.0012	.1791
		Use		-.0007	-.0209	.0191	.0792	.0010	.1632
Conditional effects of utilitarian value at values of Projection		No use		-.0346	-.1350	.0659			
		Use		.1378**	.0561	.2196			

Model 14		Moderator : Autonomy						Moderator : Competence					
Dependent variable		Well-being			Well-being			Well-being			Well-being		
Digital tool use		-.073			-.088			-.111			-.091		
Utilitarian Value		-.017			-			-.027			-		
Moderator		.546**			.336**			.528**			.275**		
Utilitarian Value X Moderator		.005			-			-.018			-		
Hedonic Value					.488**						.511**		
Hedonic Value X Moderator					.037†						.084**		
F		97.994**			219.549**			86.203**			199.590**		
R ²		.293			.481			.267			.457		
		Indirect Effects – CI 95%											
		Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Autonomy		Competence											
-1.1338		.0001	-.0078	.0075	.0581	.0001	.1178	.0000	-.0073	.0064	.0540	.0014	.1079
.0656		.0001	-.0048	.0055	.0639	.0001	.1288	.0001	-.0056	.0064	.0676	.0018	.1353
1.0966		.0001	-.0052	.0067	.0689	.0001	.1409	.0002	-.0071	.0093	.0774	.0021	.1572
Conditional effects of utilitarian or hedonic value at values of moderator		-1.1338			.4461**	.3828	.5094	-1.1511			.4146**	.3496	.4796
		.0656			.4909**	.4378	.5439	.0957			.5195**	.4634	.5756
		1.0966			.5292**	.4498	.6086	.9908			.5948**	.5168	.6728

** $p<.01$; * $p<.05$; † $p<.10$ (two-tailed test)

PROCESS procedure 14 then indicates that general autonomy and competence increase feelings of shopping well-being and these significant relationships also validate hypotheses H3 and H4 for this study 2. The mediations of hedonic value are also observed regardless of the levels of perceived autonomy and competence. The moderated mediation indices do not present significant values except for the interaction of competence with hedonic value ($b=.011$; 95% CI [.0001; .0283]). These analyses actually show that the two moderations are significant in the relationship between hedonic value and well-being: autonomy ($b=.037$; $p<.10$) and competence ($b=.084$; $p<.01$). The conditional effects highlight that the influence of hedonic value on wellbeing is greater when competence or autonomy increases, validating H5b and H6b for this study

2. PROCESS model 14 is also used to test hypothesis H7. The results indicate that the moderation of the projection in the use of digital tools is significant for the effect of perceived (a) utilitarian value on well-being ($b=.172$; $p<.01$). The conditional effects show that utilitarian value has no influence on well-being when the individual is not projected into the use of digital tools. This impact becomes significant when the individual is projected into their use ($b=.138$; $p<.01$). The moderation posed by H7b on the effect of hedonic value is not verified. The mediation of hedonic value between prior use and well-being always remains significant whether or not for projection into use.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In both studies, shopping well-being is directly reinforced by general perceptions of competence and autonomy with regard to digital tools, but also by the hedonic value of shopping. The mediation of the hedonic value, i.e. the indirect effect of prior use of digital tools on well-being through this value, is emphasized both in Study 1, which analyzes past experience in a non-food store, and in Study 2, which looks at future experience and whether or not the use of digital tools is projected. In this second study, competence and autonomy appear even more as individual characteristics that reinforce the beneficial effect of hedonic value on well-being. Thus, the central role of joy, pleasure and escape is confirmed in this study, and the prior use of digital tools reinforces the well-being felt through this hedonic value. These results are in line with the conclusions of El Hedhli, Zourrig and Chebat (2016), Shafiee and Es-Haghi (2017) and Ali, Mishra and Javed (2021).

This research reveals that the use of in-store digital tools does not increase utilitarian value, and this value has no effect on well-being, with the exception of two situations: projection in the use of digital tools makes the effect of utilitarian value on well-being significant; when consumers analyze a past shopping experience, if they feel little or not competent in the use of digital tools, utilitarian value diminishes the feeling of well-being. This surprising result (Lao, Vlad and Martin 2021; Flacandji and Vlad 2022 prove the opposite) may be explained by the perceived complexity of in-store digital tools that can have a negative effect on shopping value (Adapa et al. 2020). The perceived complexity of in-store technology depends on the consumers' level of competence (Mencarelli and Rivière 2014). The lack of effect of in-store digital tools usage on utilitarian value can also be explained by the consumer ambivalence (Flacandji and Vlad 2020) and by the ambiguous effects of technology usage (Mencarelli and Rivière 2014). In addition to the well-identified benefits in terms of time-saving, convenience and information, technology can also lead to a waste of time and an information overload, which can complicate the shopping process and reduce utilitarian value.

Projection into use of a digital tool may, however, increase the perceived utilitarian value and its effect on well-being. This result can possibly be explained by the customer's self-mental imagery encouraged by the use of a digital tool, in the absence of real conditions, with both visual and textual information. Mental imagery plays a crucial role in information processing and thus on utilitarian value (Lao, Vlad and Martin 2021). Previous literature has been inconclusive as to whether technology use has a positive or negative impact on well-being. We show that it has a positive impact on well-being via the hedonic value which is reinforced by competence and autonomy. Contrary, to findings of Flacandji, Vlad and Lunardo (2024) who show no effect of in-store application use on autonomy, we show that both perceptions of competence and autonomy associated with the use of digital tools have a positive impact on shopping well-being. This research contributes to the literature on omnichannel retailing by showing the positive role of in-store digital tools use on shopping well-being. The use of digital tools in physical stores (such as digital kiosks, connected screens, etc.) represents one of the most concrete expressions of omnichannel. They are firm-controlled touchpoints (Becker and Jaakkola 2020) and must be coherently and complementary linked with the physical channel in order to improve the customer's shopping experience (Roten and Vanheems 2019; Molinillo et al. 2020).

At the level of managerial implications, since both studies show the hedonic shopping value improves shopping well-being, retailers should highlight this effect in their communication campaigns. Communication about the digital tools should clearly highlight the features that enable customers to become smart and autonomous shoppers and the positive impact of digital use on their shopping well-being. To reinforce feelings of autonomy and competence in the customer, retailers can also offer simple tutorials, demonstrations or provide a one-off assistant to help with the first use. It would even be possible to gamify the learning of these tools by offering missions or rewards in the form of promotions. To reinforce this

learning, retailers can also personalize the approach according to the customer's level of digital competence, in order to avoid any negative experiences. Retailers should also encourage the use of these digital tools for hedonic purposes, and not just for functional use. These digital tools could offer fun and engaging experiences to stimulate positive emotions, such as pleasure. The addition of social features (customer reviews, shared recommendations, suggestions, etc.) could also improve the psychological need of relatedness according to the SDT.

The current research is not exempt from some limitations that offer potentially useful opportunities for future research. First of all, half of the respondents are students in both studies. It can be useful to test the proposed hypotheses on a more demographically diverse and representative sample. Then, Study 2 led respondents to imagine using/not using a specific version of digital kiosk of their choice based on a photo and written instructions. This method has some limitations, and to increase external validity, it could be useful to run a field experiment with a given retailer. Our results also showed no impact of digital tool use on utilitarian shopping value. Further research could thus attempt to better understand the underlying mechanism that explains this result.

Finally, our research did not take the relatedness dimension developed by SDT into consideration since some in-store digital tools, may provide low social interactions (Grewal et al. 2020). Future studies could thus explore the impact of digital tools usage on the social interactions, social shopping value dimension and well-being, and take into account other moderating factors such as cultural influences or brand trust. Furthermore, since perceived value is a dynamic and contextual variable (Filser 2007), an analysis of the value before and after the use of digital tools would allow a better understanding of its impact on shopping wellbeing.

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