How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing.

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DECLARATION

I, Baptiste Beauchamps,
Confirm that this work submitted for assessment is my own and is expressed in my own words. Any uses made within it of the works of other authors in any form (e.g., ideas, equations, figures, text, tables, programs) are properly acknowledged at any point of their use. A list of the references employed is included.

Signed:

Date: 16/08/2012
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ABSTRACT

Throughout all the evolutions in new technologies and in civilisation behaviours, the world has been confronted to a new phenomenon influencing more and more e-Commerce users, the Word-of-Mouth. Word-of-Mouth is an interesting phenomenon to study because it is a really difficult phenomenon to control. Word-of-Mouth as applied to online purchasing for products and services is already well-known from many different researchers and marketers. However it is still really hard to control it for the marketers who recently started to fully consider this phenomenon like one of the most powerful phenomenon to influence and attract customers.

Regarding the different researches already done and presented in this paper throughout the Literature Review, Word-of-Mouth topic has already been explored different times through different ways. This dissertation has been led in order to analyse the importance of the phenomenon from the consumers’ points of view but also from the marketers’ points of view. Throughout different analysis such as survey and experts’ interviews, to gauge public and marketers’ opinions and behaviours, this paper reconsidered the different existing analysis and studies to present a different way to understand the importance of the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon. Indeed, this phenomenon is not negligible and need to be well understood by the marketers to be able to handle it and to continue to attract customers. This paper shows the effect of Word-of-Mouth on the consumers and shows how the different Word-of-Mouth marketing’s tools are more or less powerful to attract and influence customers. Despite a lack of answers for the experts’ interviews this paper shows the importance of the phenomenon for the e-Commerce users throughout a 150 answers’ survey. Word-of-Mouth marketing appears like the most powerful marketing tool for the consumers. In the different tools studied the advice from a friend, colleague or family member seems to be the main argument to push consumers to buy products or services.

More widely, this paper attempts to explore the different factors and effects of Word-of-Mouth on the current business world. In this way this dissertation showed the importance of different factors such as the influence of negative Word-of-Mouth compare to positive Word-of-Mouth. Or even the importance of the effects of Word-of-Mouth on the customers and how it could lead customers to stop purchasing with such a brand or website.

Keywords: Word-of-Mouth Phenomenon, e-Commerce, Traditional Marketing, Word-of-Mouth Marketing, Referral System, Online Purchasing, Word-of-Mouth effects.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Right from the beginning, humans have continuously communicated with each other, sharing and talking about everything, everywhere any time. In this way, it is really easy to share point of views, experiences, disagreements, or even advices and to develop informal communications. Thus, people will easily tell their last experience and give their point of view about the product, the website, the quality of the service etc... The past thirty years have seen the rapid development of the Internet and the different way to communicate with each other making sharing of information easier and more effective thanks to technology.

Word of Mouth (WOM) can be defined as the process of communication between two non-commercial persons and without interests in the business they are talking about (Strutton et. al. 2011). You can collect this information from family, friends, colleagues or neighbours. In the same way you can spread this information to these same persons. The Internet improved the way to communicate with people around you or around the world. As this paper will show it later e-Word-of-Mouth is one of the most important factors in Word-of-Mouth and the social networks improve the importance of this phenomenon.

Marketing is an important part of the companies’ strategies. These strategies are more and more innovative and intrusive in people lives. Nowadays, Word-of-Mouth is also a great factor in marketing and more especially in e-Marketing. The different tools used by marketers in order to transmit information to potential customers are present everywhere on the Web, from advertisements to advice on blogs or forums. Even if the standard marketing tools such as TV advertisements or commercial emails campaigns are today well-known, users are less aware of the Word-of-Mouth marketing tools used by the companies. Throughout the literature review this research will present some tools used by marketing departments to use the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon.

The last point is that today, people are confronted with a lot of different offers each time they want to buy something. It is increasingly difficult to make a choice to buy a computer or even a coffee machine. In this way a lot of people prefer to rely on friends’ advices and be aware of all the alternatives available to them. Thus, “the person is able to make the most rational and value-
maximizing decision” (Pyle 2010).

1.2 Introduction

In a fast moving world and in our current consumer society, where everything is changing quickly, where products and services are quickly becoming obsolete, and where firms offer to the customers an ever more diverse range of products and services, customers need to face the fierce competition that engages companies to attract customers. In this way, customers are more and more vigilant about the products or services that they will buy. Even if most of the time they will privilege the cheapest ones with the best quality, it is not really easy to be sure that it is the good one. In this way most of the consumers share their opinions regarding their choices with other people to collect information about the products, services and brands before purchasing.

After consuming the product, more and more consumers are willing feedback, creating an exchange of information between consumers, and developing more and more the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon. Thanks to the Internet, consumers have the widest possible source of information to succeed in this direction. A lot of blogs, forums and social networking websites in the World Wide Web offer customers the means of receiving and sharing this kind of information. Especially for the e-Commerce websites where it is easier to give your feedback thanks to these platforms. Thus, the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon developed initially through Face-to-face communication’s way is now also available via all the technologies including the Internet, leading consumers to the e-Word-of-Mouth phenomenon.

Like this research will point out in the next chapters, the development of the Internet, of the e-Commerce, of the social network coupled with the Word-of-Mouth effects could be nowadays one of the best marketing tools.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

Considering the growing interest of the Internet users for e-Commerce and considering the growing impact of the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon this research has different aims. The aims of this paper were born following different discussions with teachers and colleagues revealing that Word-of-Mouth information for online purchasing does not have the same effect for everyone. Then they were built following different researches including what was already done in previous researches
and what was concluded. Thus, different aims were drawn for this dissertation, the first aim of this paper is to investigate the interest of the consumers in Word-of-Mouth to influence their online purchasing behaviour. The second aim of this paper is to evaluate the different factors such as age or gender influencing the interest in Word-of-Mouth. The third aim of this paper is to investigate the marketing behaviour considering the Internet development and Word-of-Mouth, their consideration for Word-of-Mouth Marketing, what are they already doing to manage that, and what are they planning to do.

The objectives of this paper were split in different research questions:

- How people use and spread Word-of-Mouth information about online purchasing experience?
- How people perceive Word-of-Mouth Marketing?
- How marketers handle the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon?

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation is built to allow the reader to understand how and why this research has been done. The structure is based to lead the research questions from their birth to the findings and limitations while ensuring that the readers are aware of the methods used and their reliability. The different chapters in this paper are, Chapter 1 which introduces the current context, the topic of the dissertation, the different aims of this dissertation and the structure of the dissertation. The Chapter 2, which is the literature review, describes the existing researches and defines the different elements of the topic. The Chapter 3, which is the research methodology, presents the methodology used in this dissertation to investigate and answer the research questions presented in the aims of the dissertation. The Chapter 4 presents the results gotten during the process stage of the survey and the interviews, it explains the different meanings for these results and how they can participate to answer the research questions. The Chapter 5 is the conclusion of this research which gives a conclusion to the research and summarizes the different interesting points discussed during this research. The last chapter discusses the dissertation’s limitations and further researches which could be done.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Researches on Word-of-Mouth effects, Word-of-Mouth factors and on marketing’s impacts have come a long way. Different authors explored the different factors and effects of Word-of-Mouth in the current society and how the marketers can capitalize on this phenomenon to attract customers (Allsop et. al. 2007, Lam et. al. 2009, Trusov et. al. 2009). These different studies led this paper to research the development of the Internet and Word-of-Mouth to impact the marketer’s behaviour face to the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon and the e-Word-of-Mouth phenomenon.

In this way this literature review will firstly explore the Word-of-Mouth effects. Then, it will observe the Word-of-Mouth factors and actors. The aim is to compare the Word-of-Mouth marketing’s power and the traditional marketing. So, the literature review will present traditional marketing and then Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM). After that this chapter will introduce and discuss about the Word-of-Mouth referral systems, the social networks and the e-Word-of-Mouth.

2.2 Word-of-Mouth Effects

Word-of-Mouth could have different kinds of effects in the current world. Firstly, it could be positive or negative effects. Secondly, it could affect the product, the brand, the service or even the employees' behaviour within the company (Lam et. al. 2009). Word-of-Mouth’s effects may have different targets. An important target is for example the product’s successful diffusion which could be affected by the “spread of positive word of mouth and the lack of negative word of mouth” (Lam et. al. 2009). Another target could be the arrival of a brand in a new market. If the brand has not a good image by the Word-of-Mouth spreading, it will be really tough for the company to launch its products and services in this new market.

In business, an important effect of Word-of-Mouth is the customer acquisition (Schumann et. al. 2010, Trusov et. al. 2009). From short-term effect to long-term effect, Word-of-Mouth communication is a good way for enterprises to attract new customers. It is possible to measure it thanks to Word-of-Mouth referrals (Word-of-Mouth Referrals part) and to the sign-up processes (Trusov et. al. 2009). If customers never heard about a brand or if they never thought to buy a product or a service via this brand, the fact that some relatives recommend this brand to them will probably affect their behaviour and lead them to choose this brand over another one.
A lot of people consult other people before buying something. The first persons that you will consult are family members, and then you will give more credit to someone with experience and knowledge in this field. For example you will be more influenced by your brother in IT to buy a computer than by your brother doing management for a cosmetic brand. However, you will probably buy cosmetic products from your brother's company more easily than from another company, because he will tell you a lot of positive things about the products and he will be more credible than any other advertisement. The persons most affected by this are people in high-uncertainty-avoidance culture (Schumann et. al. 2010), who need to be more reassured and who will ask advice from their trustworthy relatives. This advice will reduce their anxiety and allow them to make a reflected purchase.

“Word-of-Mouth is one of the most influential channels of communication in the marketplace” (Allsop et. al. 2007). Word-of-Mouth has a real effect on the companies' reputation, like Harris Interactive (2006) proofed it. Among the different communication channels such as advertisements for Company, personal experience and public relations, Word-of-Mouth is the most popular channel.
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(Allsop et. al. 2007, Harris Interactive 2006) to impact the emotional appeal and the products/services for companies' reputation. Moreover in the Harris Interactive researches it is proofed that Word-of-Mouth is a very credible information source, more than advertising. However it is less credible than the customer's personal experience which is twice more important according to Harris Interactive's survey (Figure 1).

Word-of-Mouth has a different impact on people, depends if they are experienced or not in this area of business (Shumann et. al. 2010). When you do not have any experience in an area of business you will be more influenced by someone who will tell you something positive or negative about a particular brand. On the other hand if you have your own usual brand you will be less tempted by another brand that a relative advises you to purchase. However if the Word-of-Mouth communication about the brand that you are usually using is negative you will be probably more affected. In this way this paper will explore in the next part the different Word-of-Mouth factors and actors which could be influential.

2.3 Word-of-Mouth Factors and Actors

One of the main reasons in Word-of-Mouth's existence could be explained by the non-propagation of negative information by marketers. People receive positive information and advertisements but never received, from a commercial source, negative consequences of purchase (Webster 1970).

Word-of-Mouth is a phenomenon affecting products and services. However according to De Matos et. al. (2008), services are the most affected by Word-of-Mouth because of “the intangibility and experiential nature of services”. In this context it can be analysed that the nature of the property for which they invested money, depends if they are goods or services, will influence our behaviour for Word-of-Mouth spreading. Moreover within the products that consumers can buy there are difference depending of the nature of the product and services (Allsop et. al. 2007). Harris Interactive via its online survey (2006) studied the different behaviours about Word-of-Mouth depending of the nature of the product (Figure 2). Examples of the products tested are restaurant, computers, movies, vehicles, medicine, or even nutrition. It analysed the capacity for buyer to seek information via Word-of-Mouth and the capacity for existing consumer to provide information via Word-of-Mouth. Thus, it can be observed that the capacity to seek information and to provide information, depending of the field, is proportional. The number of person giving a great extent to seek and provide are proportional and it is also true for people giving some extent or not at all.
However, as pointed out Allsop et. al. (2007) “the proportion of the population involved in WOM varies from one category to another”. Thus, the proportion for restaurants is five times more important than for athletic shoes for example.

![Image: Word-of-Mouth: A Two-Way Exchange](source)

Source: Harris Interactive, online survey of 2,084 U.S. adults, conducted September 27-29, 2006.

**Figure 2**: Word-of-Mouth: A Two-Way Exchange

Another factor in spreading Word-of-Mouth is the marketplace. Word-of-Mouth is more common in customer market than in the industrial market (Webster 1970). Probably due to the nature of Word-of-Mouth which is more a non-commercial and informal communication way. Indeed, the proximity is a critical factor for Word-of-Mouth and is more widespread and defined in non-commercial area (Webster 1970).

Different authors studied the impact of cultural values on Word-of-Mouth (Hofstede 2001, Schumann et. al. 2010, Lam et. al. 2009) and have drawn some conclusions. The different cultural factors studied are country of origin, gender, individualism or collectivism. People in collectivism culture are more prone to spread information via Word-of-Mouth due to their strong social ties. However people in individualism culture, even if they find less people to listen to them, are more prone to develop a willingness to impose their opinion and show others their presence and thinking (Schumann et. al. 2010). Moreover the individualists prefer to spread their opinion to an outside
group rather than their inside group, they prefer to target the other individualists in other groups (Lam et. al. 2009).

Depending on the country the cultural values would not be the same (Schumann et. al. 2010). Thus, the marketers would adopt different strategies and try to develop Word-of-Mouth differently if the customers in this country are more prone to advertisements or advice from relative persons. The country also influences another factor influencing Word-of-Mouth, the gender. Depending on the place of men and women in their society, the gender would be more or less influencing.

According to Hofstede (2001), the feminine culture is more prone to social ties and rumours. They would spread their opinions easily, their culture being more likely by strong relationship orientation (Schumann et. al. 2010). The masculinity culture is more oriented to put in an appearance and is more materialistic (Lam et. al. 2009). Moreover, masculinity value is more aggressive and frankly gives his opinion. On the other hand, femininity value would be more discrete (Lam et. al. 2009, Hofstede 2001). In conclusion, even if the gender influences the way to perceive or provide Word-of-Mouth, the gender does not influence Word-of-Mouth (Schumann et. al. 2010).

Opinion leaders are persons with a strong influence and that people will listen more readily (Webster 1970). They will exert their leadership skills to transmit information about such or such product or service and people will be more responsive to them. These opinion leaders could be found within a club or family circle in the real sphere and would be found on forums or blogs in the web sphere (like this chapter will explore it in the Social Network part). People surrounding them will take into account their advices like from experts. Thus, opinion leaders within their sphere of influence would be able to promote or destroy a product or service's reputation. In this way, Word-of-Mouth is definitively influenced by the nature of the propagator.

There are different kind of Word-of-Mouth, the short-term Word-of-Mouth (or immediate Word-of-Mouth) and the long-term Word-of-Mouth (or on-going Word-of-Mouth). The immediate Word-of-Mouth is just after a purchase or the reception of Word-of-Mouth (the first week after), the on-going Word-of-Mouth is later, more than one week after (Berger and Schwartz 2011).

According to Trusov et. al. (2009) who studied a comparison between the impact of Word-of-Mouth referrals and traditional marketing in more or less long term, Word-of-Mouth is more efficient than traditional marketing but it is even more important in long term than in short-term.

Both are really important for marketing, immediate Word-of-Mouth can create a buzz about a product or service and on-going Word-of-Mouth can ensure the permanence of a product or service. Different other Word-of-Mouth's factors come to influence these two different Word-of-Mouths. For
example “products that are cued more by the environment receive more immediate Word-of-Mouth” (Berger et al. 2011). The publicly visible products are not affected by immediate or on-going Word-of-Mouth, both are important. A factor which gives more immediate Word-of-Mouth and no on-going Word-of-Mouth is the interest of the product (Berger et al. 2011).

In this way, the fact that the product is interesting - or not - influences Word-of-Mouth. Indeed, people speak more easily about interesting products, services, brands or advertisements than boring ones (Berger et al. 2011). Another criterion that Berger et al. (2011) described like influencing Word-of-Mouth is the accessibility of the product, especially for on-going Word-of-Mouth. Indeed, it is easier to speak about a product that you use every day or that is cheap enough so that everyone can buy it. Moreover the public product are more often evoked than private products, it is easier to think and to speak about products that you can see around you daily than products which are seldom used.

De Matos et al. (2008) studied different Word-of-Mouth's factors, satisfaction, loyalty, quality, commitment and trust. The satisfaction influences Word-of-Mouth by the fact that it is the first felling that you can feel when you use a product or service. The loyalty is your affinity and past with a special brand or company. The quality depends exclusively of the product or service and your perception of it. Commitment could be associated with loyalty in the fact that it is difficult to have commitment without loyalty. However commitment represents “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship” (Moorman et al. 1992). Trust represents confidence that you place in a product, service or brand.

The study reveals that the most influential factor for Word-of-Mouth is commitment, the second one is quality, the third one is trust, then satisfaction and in last position loyalty (De Matos et al. 2008).

Two different types of Word-of-Mouth can appear, positive Word-of-Mouth and negative Word-of-Mouth. Even if positive and negative ones are really influential, negative Word-of-Mouth about a product, service or brand is more influential than for a positive one (Blythe 2008 p189-227, Breazeale 2009, Trusov et al. 2009). Indeed, a customer who wants to spread negative information about a product, service or brand is probably dissatisfied and has more willpower to discredit the product (Breazeale 2009). In this way, De Matos et al. (2008) studied the effect of satisfaction and loyalty on positive or negative word-of-Mouth. The result is that satisfaction will give more positive Word-of-Mouth than loyalty but that disloyalty will give more negative Word-of-Mouth than dissatisfaction. Moreover they concluded that to increase positive Word-of-Mouth from customers, companies need to increase customers’ commitment (De Matos et al. 2008).
2.4 Traditional Marketing

The basic idea of marketing is the communication from companies to their customers, or potential customers, to attract them to buy their products and services. One of the most used definition of marketing is: “Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchange and satisfy individual and organisational objectives” (Blythe 2008 p1-19, Brassington & Pettitt 2006 p5-46, Gamble et al. 2011). Some of the key concepts in marketing are managing exchange, segmentation and targeting and positioning. Managing exchange is to manage the exchange with the customer through advertisements and special offers. Segmentation and targeting is process of gathering people in interests' groups and to target them for a special offer rather than target everybody. And positioning is the image and the position that the brand occupies, especially from targeted customers' point of view (Blythe 2008 p1-19).


Figure 3: Promotional Mix

Nowadays, marketing is more about the relationship between organisation and customers, more focus on the customers' needs (Brassington & Pettitt 2006 p5-46). To ensure that, the customers' needs need to be identified and satisfied. One of the solutions is to respect the marketing mix which is mixing the product, the price, the promotion and the place. The marketing part which is
interesting in this paper is the communication part. And to ensure a good communication from the organisation to the company in marketing, companies need to use the basic promotional mix (Figure 3) (Blythe 2008 p189-227). This promotional principle mixes the different communication methods, advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and public relations. Actually, these marketing communications techniques are used from a long time and it is usually possible to observe it everywhere. The communication way which is the most interesting for this paper is public relations which include Word-of-Mouth marketing like this paper will explore it in the next part.

With the twenty-first century is born a new marketing way, more based on a relationship with the consumer than with a traditional marketing way, which was limited to the exchange of communication from the organisation to the consumer (Blythe 2008 p279-308). Based on the fact that in most cases customers will buy several times the same kind of product in their life, the interest to create a good relationship with the customer is interesting for the company. In this way, the organisation will create different tools such as loyalty card to reward loyal customers but not only. Organisation will use Word-of-Mouth systems to develop a relational marketing from a customer to another customer.

2.5 Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Like this paper demonstrated it, Word-of-Mouth is one of the most important and influential source of information (Lam et. al. 2009). And in the marketing context the fact to transmit information and to influence them is really interesting. Thus, “Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM) is the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques” (Kozinets et. al. 2010). Moreover, the aim of marketing is to capture customers' attention and as Kozinets et. al. (2010) said it, “WOM affects the majority of all purchase decisions”. Therefore Word-of-Mouth is also a key element from the marketing strategies, especially as Word-of-Mouth is also responsible of 20-50% of purchase decision (Bughin et. al. 2010). Beside, most of the marketing services' companies use Word-of-Mouth like a standard in their marketing campaigns (Berger 2011).

Word-of-Mouth needs to be kept under control for marketers. Indeed, the consequences from positive or negative Word-of-Mouth can be important. Positive Word-of-Mouth can influence consumers to adopt a new product and negative one can influence consumers to switch from a brand to another brand (Lam et. al. 2009).
As this paper said, Word-of-Mouth's impact is more or less important. The most important impact could be when the customer is buying something for the first time or when the customer is buying something which is expensive (Bughin et. al. 2010). In this way to influence the first purchase of the customer, marketing services can measure the success of Word-of-Mouth thanks to the new customer acquisition (Trusov et. al. 2009). Indeed, a new member's registration and his first purchase could be routed, thanks to referral systems (Word-of-Mouth Referrals part) or thanks to email transfers, to Word-of-Mouth action and benefit.

What marketers can do? It is, to influence the existing customers, offer them financial incentives to spread information about the company around them and to incite their friends to sign-up to the company's website for example (Trusov et. al. 2009). Moreover when information about a company is spreading, the source of the Word-of-Mouth information is really important for the company. Thus, if marketers spread via their existing customers they need to consider different criteria. The content of the message, the identity of the diffuser and the environment where the information is transmitted (Bughin et. al. 2010). In this way it is important for marketers to analyse their target and to focus on the good individuals and messages about the product or service that they want to transmit (Allsop et. al. 2007). Without forgetting that Word-of-Mouth is not under control for firms (Blythe 2008 p189-227) and that individuals spreading information about a brand can change their mind and message.

2.6 Word-of-Mouth and Referral Systems

One of the most important objectives for marketers is to attract new customers. In the aim to do this successfully, companies invested a lot of money in Word-of-Mouth referrals (Biyalogorsky et. al. 2001, Schumann et. al. 2010). Word-of-Mouth referrals is a way to attract new customers who will receive an invitation from a friend to join the website, sign up, or buy something thanks to a special offer. This way of communication is great for marketers because every customer is a potential referrer and every future customer who could sign-up, via a referral system, is a potential future referrer too.

A good way to measure Word-of-Mouth referrals is to observe new sign-ups (Trusov et. al. 2009). Sign-up represents the fact to join a company's website, giving it your personal details and receiving a pseudo to be able to log you each time you will visit this website.

The referral systems are not only interesting for the companies. Most of the time they are offering some rewards to the customers bringing new customers (Schmitt et. al. 2011). Thus, the customer
How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing

Can become a marketer for the firm, using his affinity with non-customers to earn some benefits such as vouchers or special offers. Biyalogorsky et. al. (2001) explained that offering reward to the customers motivates referrals.

One of the advantages of the referral systems is that marketers can initiate it, compare to overall Word-of-Mouth (Schmitt et. al. 2011). Indeed, it is really hard to incite indirectly someone to tell good think about your company in the middle of a discussion. However, if the customer has an interest to say to his friends how your company is great and that he should sign up and buy something, he would probably speak easily to his friends about your company.

The success of referral system is also due to the fact that people (in the same way as overall Word-of-Mouth) will be more confident if the information and the tip come from a personal source than from a commercial source (Schumann et. al. 2010). Moreover, once the non-customer becomes a new customer, Schmidtt et. al. (2011) proofed that his behaviour is more interesting for the company than someone attracted by another way. For example the first purchase for a referred customer is 16% higher than for a non-referred customer. Thus, it is more interesting to invest money to the existent customers and a referral program than in traditional marketing which would attract classic customers (or non-referred customers). Moreover if the referred customer becomes a regular customer and himself refers customers, the scope of the company will be greater.

Despite that, companies need to be cautious with the way they use Word-of-Mouth referrals. Indeed, the customers could be attracted only by the voucher and not become a loyal and interesting customer after referred someone or after been referred (Schmidt et. al. 2011). The time that the customer will stay signed to the website and the number of goods or services he will buy are really important for the company. Some investments in the referral systems by the marketing services require a minimum of return on investment to be efficient. In this way, “in most referral programs, the reward is given regardless of how long the new referred customers stay with the firm” (Schmidt et. al. 2011). Thus, the customer who refers the website to his friends all the same will receive a reward, so he is still interested to refer the website. And to receive it he will need to be sure that his friend referred, buy enough products or services on this website, thus the website will have an efficient return on investment.
2.7 Social Network

Nowadays new technologies are everywhere around us. These new technologies changed our way to communicate and to interact with people. People now use more technology platforms such as email, chat, phone or social networking websites (Katona et. al. 2011) than before, when they used face-to-face communication or mails. Usability of these technologies makes them more attractive and facilitates people's communication.

The communication's technology, which is the most interesting for Word-of-Mouth, is the social networking websites in World Wide Web. These kinds of websites could be finding in the form of blogs, forums or personal pages such as Facebook or MySpace. They are usually created by some people who propagate the site to their own personal networks and gradually the number of people following and interested in this site grows up (Trusov et. al. 2009).

Katona et. al. (2011) studied the impact for an individual to influence another individual via social networking websites. They concluded in the interest of this technology to disseminate an idea from individual to individual and then from this individual to another individual. Moreover they concluded that someone with few friends will have a better impact on his friends when he will transmit a message than someone with many friends (Katona et. al. 2011).

As this paper said before, the blogs are a great way to communicate idea, opinion and passed experiences to a large number of Internet users. One of the interesting things for Word-of-Mouth Marketing in blogs is that “blogs constitute a social network that is not only about the sharing of information but also about building trust, friendship, and alliances” (Kozinets et. al. 2010). Thus, the bloggers can transmit his opinions with a bigger impact. The principle of blogs is simple; bloggers are writing articles and publish it on the Internet via their blogs. The users are then able to read it but not only. The blogs' readers are also able to comment the articles and to specify if they like the article or not. Thus, the article can earn more or less credibility depending if the comments are good or not. Moreover each person who is taking some time to comment an article has probably been affected by the article (in the good or bad way) and thus be more apt to discuss about the content of the article with some other friends.

In this way, the companies' marketing services have understood quickly the interest of these social networks and contacted the bloggers to offer them some free products or services in exchange for articles about these products. The bloggers have two roles to manage, member and marketer.

Success of blogs, forums and social networking websites to transmit information is because of different reasons. The first criterion is the importance of the blogger, the fact that it is a non-
commercial person, someone who could be your neighbour or one of your colleagues. The second
criterion is the type of forum or blog. If it is a private blog, a blog specialized for cars, computers or
girl’s products, a forum about cooking or even a forum about health care. The third criterion is the
communal norms, depending on different criteria such as the size of the website, the origin of its
members and their interests. This criterion manages the manner to communicate and express
himself within the blog. The last criterion is the content of the messages. For example, if these
messages are private with personal facts or if there are some promotional characteristics in the
messages like for a post created as a result of a special offer from a company. (Kozinets et. al.
2010). Moreover success comes from interactivity, presence of personalized information,
convenience, and specialization (I-Ping Chiangchung-Hsien 2011).

All these characteristics do to the social network a real opportunity for marketers to use it to
develop Word-of-Mouth Marketing and to disseminate their information to a wide audience.

2.8 Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Like this article described it in the precedent parts, Word-of-Mouth is becoming a more and more
important phenomenon. Also with the power of the Internet, people have the possibility to express
their opinion more easily and to be read by many people (Breazeale 2009). Thus, thanks to the new
technologies and specially the social networks (Social Networks part), Word-of-Mouth has
gradually tended to electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) which is a real “promotional weapons”
(Strutton et. al. 2011) for marketers due to millions of users every day (Allsop et. al. 2007, Strutton
et. al. 2011).

It is easy to measure the importance of the e-Word-of-Mouth phenomenon thanks to the number of
articles wrote these last years about e-Word-of-Mouth. From less than five articles each year until
2005, there are from 2007 more than ten articles written each year (Breazeale 2009) (Figure 4).

e-Word-of-Mouth is not only present throughout the Internet. Thanks to the fact that teenagers for
example are increasingly becoming mobile's users addicts, Okazaki (2009) led some studies about
Word-of-Mouth effect via mobiles and concluded that face-to-face Word-of-Mouth is more efficient
than mobile-based Word-of-Mouth. In this way this paper will now focus the term e-Word-of-
Mouth on the Internet-based Word-of-Mouth.
e-Word-of-Mouth is like a weapon for firms. Firms are able to send millions of emails containing advertisements or special offers to the customers listed in their database. But where the power of e-Word-of-Mouth is, it is in the e-forwarding principle (Strutton et. al. 2011). Customers receiving the email from the firm are able to forward it to their friends, colleagues, family members and neighbours. In this way, the message will gain in credibility and positive Word-of-Mouth because of the sender will be now a person known to the receiver. Thus, the receiver will give more attention to the message; he will send it to his relatives and integrate it in his personal network (Strutton et. al. 2011). The new phenomenon created by e-Word-of-Mouth is 'viral' Word-of-Mouth (Strutton et. al 2011. Considering the importance of e-Word-of-Mouth phenomenon, marketers need to learn how manage and lead efficiently e-Word-of-Mouth (Strutton et. al. 2011).

2.9 Conclusion

Throughout the different parts of this literature review, this paper studied the different meanings of each main ideas of the dissertation topic, “How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing”. Thus, the different parts studied in this literature review were, the Word-of-Mouth effects, the Word-of-Mouth factors and actors, the traditional marketing, Word-of-Mouth marketing, the Word-of-Mouth referral systems, the social networks and the last one, e-Word-of-Mouth.
In conclusion Word-of-Mouth is nowadays an important phenomenon that marketers need to integrate with traditional marketing considering its influence and efficiency. Indeed, Word-of-Mouth is today a phenomenon known and unavoidable which can improve the traditional marketing schemes.

Marketers need to understand and treat with the different effects and factors resulting from Word-of-Mouth and influencing Word-of-Mouth. Many different factors influence Word-of-Mouth and its effects. The most important ones are the interest of the product or service, if Word-of-Mouth is positive or negative, who is the messenger of the Word-of-Mouth information and the quality of the information. Moreover marketers need to take care about the fact that millions of individuals use every day the Internet to communicate and to find information about everything including products, services or brands. Giving to the e-Word-of-Mouth phenomenon more and more power to promote or destroy brand’s reputations. In this way, e-Word-of-Mouth attracts more and more marketing services’ companies to apprehend it and to try to manage and manipulate it.
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the different methods used to answer the different objectives and research questions of this paper. This research used a set of different methods from getting data to interpret this data. In this way the different methods used will be presented as follows.

The first part will explain why this paper used the mixed method research using qualitative and quantitative methods. The second part will present this paper has selected the survey and interviews sample and how they were contacted. The two next parts will reveal the questionnaire and interview definitions and contents. The fifth part will describe the methods used to analyse the results and to interpret it. And the last part will describe the professional, legal and ethical issues for the dissertation.

3.2 Mixed Methods Research

In the aim to answer the different research questions, this research needed two different data. One is coming from the different e-Commerce websites’ users and the other from the different e-Commerce websites’ marketing teams. It is obvious that both of them will not give the same results. Indeed, the different e-Commerce websites’ users are able to report their behaviours but cannot give an expert opinion. However the e-Commerce websites’ marketing teams can give in addition to their behaviours their expert opinions. In this way this paper used the mixed methods research for which one, the quantitative and qualitative researches are combined using for example a structured survey with an unstructured interview (Axinn et. al. 2006, Truscott et. al. 2010). These two different approaches to collect data will be considered differently, indeed the questionnaires will give the opportunity to study more widely and to gauge the public opinion, and the interviews will give a better quality for the answers due to the respondents’ expert status. The method used was more exactly a concurrent mixed methods research because the quantitative and the qualitative researches were run in a same phase to be analysed and interpreted together thereafter (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). Thus, that “provided a richer and more comprehensive response to the research questions” (Saunders et. al. 2012).

In this research, neither one method nor the other will be favoured. Indeed both do not target the same respondents and do not give the same information. However the different information from
How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing

one or the other are complementary.

In the different natures of the research designs established by Saunders et. al. (2012) there are exploratory studies, descriptive studies and explanatory studies. This dissertation’s research design is based on an exploratory studies design, indeed the aim of the dissertation is to identify customers’ behaviours, why do they behave this way and how marketing teams try to handle it.

About the time horizon for this study, a cross-sectional study was employed which is the fact to realize the research at a particular time, compare to longitudinal studies which explore the changes throughout the study (Saunders et. al. 2012).

3.2.1 Quantitative method

The data collected via the quantitative method were gathered via an online survey. Surveys are an efficient and really well known way to do research and to get data as “survey methods are probably the oldest methods in the researcher’s repertoire, and they are the methods with which the general public is most familiar” (Dane 1990). The survey method is more proper to answer “what, who, where, how much and how many questions” (Saunders 2012) and it is exactly what this paper wanted from this survey. Indeed, the aim of this survey was to obtain the usual behaviour of the e-Commerce websites’ customers.

In a survey, the most important thing to keep in mind is that the editor and the participants are working together. In this way the editor has to keep the survey attractive for the participants (Dane 1990). According to Dane (1990) surveys can collect three different types of information, facts, behaviours and opinions. Once again this different information resumes exactly what this paper wanted to collect as part of this dissertation. Later on, this paper will focus on those questions which give this different information. Thanks to this survey this research has been able to gauge the public opinion and to get the necessary information to try to answer the different research questions. Another important part of the survey is to ensure that the survey answers will not be biased with a lack of trustworthiness or reliability perceived by the participant but the paper will come back on this point later.

3.2.2 Qualitative method

This paper used qualitative methods in the aim to collect experts’ opinions to understand how are working marketing teams to face and to handle Word-of-Mouth marketing. The qualitative method which is more flexible (Daymon et. al. 2011) allows respondents to explain in their own words their
thoughts and knowledge, it is also the opportunity to collect more critical and interpretive data to fit more properly the reality of experts’ behaviours and experts’ opinions.

There are a lot of different questionnaire designs corresponding to qualitative methods.

And among these different methods the Interviewer-completed methods, which allow to select a smaller sample of respondents but to have more precise and interesting answers, were chosen. With this kind of questionnaires it is sure that the respondents will exactly answer the question which has been asked and if they deviate from the original question the interviewer can easily redirect them to it. Thanks to these questionnaires the interviewer also can be sure that the respondent well meets the selection criteria to answer the questionnaire and that he well understands the questionnaire’s issues. That fosters the reliability and the trustworthiness that the paper can give to qualitative method. In fact, the respondent is more reliable than for a quantitative method where it is more difficult to be sure that the participant meets perfectly the criteria selection (Flick 2009).

Due to the fact that telephone interviews are more easily doable than face to face interview this research has attempted to realize the interviews of the experts via telephone interviews.

3.3 Sample Definition

Whatever the method used, quantitative or qualitative, this paper needed to determine a proper sample to process the researches. Because of the fact that neither of both are designed to answer the same questions and to collect answers from the same persons the two different methods processed are not targeting the same sample.
Regarding the qualitative research the aim was to collect expert opinion. In this way this paper was not concerned by the number of respondents but by the quality of the respondents. Thus, this research selected fifteen different companies such as Argos, Amazon, Topshop, Pixmania, etc. and contacts them as the next section will explain it. The different companies were selected for their e-Commerce website’s importance and renown. The products and services sold by these companies are not important and none product or service’s categories have been selected. The service selected in the company to answer the questionnaire was the marketing service. The locations of the companies are not important either; British companies have been the first companies contacted. Due to the lack of answer from the British companies, French companies have been contacted to answer the interviews specially designed for them.

About the quantitative research the aim was to collect as many responses as possible. As Saunders et. al. (2012) explained: “the larger the absolute size of a sample, the closer its distribution will be to the normal distribution and thus the more robust it will be”. In this way, the survey tried to be spread as widely as possible with an objective of 150 answers, targeting common people from different ages, genders, and horizons.

According to Saunders et. al. (2012) the paper used a volunteer sampling technique. Actually, this dissertation used two different techniques in volunteer sampling: the snowball sampling and the self-selection sampling. The snowball sampling has been chosen because the survey’s website link was sent with the instructions to a lot of different people in United Kingdom and in France. It was asked in the instructions to send it to other people that they could identify as interested to answer the survey and to spread it again. The self-selection sampling technique was also used because, as the paper explained it before, the survey was sent by email and people had the possibility or not to answer it. Moreover the instructions and the survey website’s link were posted on social networks. Thus, people were able to answer or not the survey.

### 3.4 Questionnaire Definition and Content

The survey was split into different parties. The first part was the instructions that the participants needed to know before to do it. Then the questionnaire was divided in different steps, each step including different questions. The participants needed to complete a set of twenty one questions. In these 21 questions there were three different types of information (Dane 1990), the two first questions gave facts information (gender and age), and the other questions were mainly giving behaviour information or opinion information. All the questions except the optional last one were questions with unique or multiple choices answers, in average for each different question five
choices of answer were offered. Thus, all the participants needed to select at least one answer out of the five choices available for each question. This survey has been made this way in order to be easy to use for the participants. The multiple choices questions were used to give the possibility to the participants to fit their answers with their real behaviours. Some questions have been made as unique choice question in order to figure out the choice which would represent the most each participant. In the aim to improve the quality and the attractiveness of the survey and to engage the respondent from the beginning (Puleston 2011), the survey tried to use simple and well-designed questions, to be sure that everyone can have the opportunity to find the answer which would fit his behaviour.

The first part in the questionnaire was to know the gender, the age and the participants’ habits with e-Commerce websites. The second part was built to understand what would be the participants’ behaviours looking for a new product/service. The third part tried, firstly to find out the participants’ reactions regarding their online purchasing experience either they are happy or unhappy. Secondly, the third part tried to find out their reactions when relatives or friends relate their own experiences feedbacks. Finally, the last part was designed to understand in which case the participants will use Word-of-Mouth. Moreover the participants had the possibility to let this research know if they were aware of other marketing tools. They also had the possibility to let this research know their feedback about the survey and any additional comments.

3.5 Questionnaire propagation tool

To be able to present the survey, Survey Monkey which is a well-known tool offering interesting parameters to present the survey, to collect and to analyse data, was the first option considered. Unfortunately the free version of this website only gave the possibility to provide ten or less questions per survey which was not enough. Another issue was that the number of respondents was also limited with a tool such as Survey Monkey. Because of the different populations (English speakers and French speakers) who were targeted, it was necessary for this survey to be written in English and in French, like that twice the answers were expected. A pleasant and attractive interface for the survey with a presentation questions were also needed in order to convince the participants to complete the survey. In this way, a special website to put the survey online was created. To do this website the basic elements from the e-Commerce technology course’s website, created during this MSc year in Heriot-Watt University, were taken. Those elements have been adapted to create a new website entirely dedicated to the survey. PHP, HTML5, CSS3, MySQL and Apache
How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing were used to realize it.

3.6 Interview Definition, Content and Process

The three main ways to process the interviews are face-to-face interviews, phone interviews and mail/email interviews. The three different techniques have their advantages and their disadvantages as it could be observed in the Figure 6. In this dissertation case, the phone interviews were selected due to the distance to the interviewees and the cost that represents the need to go to their offices to meet them. Thus, it was really complicated to do face-to-face interviews.

In a first time the different companies have been contacted by email to ask them if they would be available and agree to participate in a MSc dissertation research answering to a short interview. The companies given their email contact details on their website have been contacted with the questionnaire attached. The other companies allowing contacting them only via a form on their website have been asked to transfer their contact details to schedule a phone interview and to receive the questionnaire.

Unfortunately only few companies gave a positive answer. Due to unavailability and busy schedule, the only positive answers this dissertation received were that they accepted to receive the questionnaire by email in the aim to return it completed.

The phone interview would have given the opportunity to well understand the behaviour of the company in term of marketing and its position relative to Word-of-Mouth marketing. The precisions that the interviewer can ask each time that the answer given is not enough are crucial for better understanding and improve the quality of this research. The email interviews are really interesting too. The respondent can answer the questions really seriously, and therefore the research could have used entirely his response.

Unfortunately, not even one company took the time to answer this research’s questionnaire. In a first time only the British companies have been contacted but none answered the interview (neither phone interview nor email interview). In a second time and in the aim to collect answer, French companies have been contacted. Unfortunately none of them answered either. Some companies replied to the email to receive the interview’s questionnaire but never sent it back completed.

The interview was an eight questions interview. The first set of questions was about the marketing behaviour of the company and the second set of questions was about their opinion and behaviour about Word-of-Mouth marketing. Thus, it would have given the opportunity to understand
professionals’ point of view and how the companies handle the development of Word-of-Mouth in e-Commerce. The last set of questions was about the changes in marketing behaviour following to the development of the Internet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Face-to-face</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Mail</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Availability of a complete sample</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely listed population</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompletely listed population</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to select respondents</td>
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<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to locate specific respondents</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
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<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For homogeneous sample</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to avoid volunteer bias</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Tolerance for complexity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success with open-ended items</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success with screening items</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence control/contingency items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Success with tedious items</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Avoidance of interviewer bias</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<td>Avoidance of interference from nonrespondents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidance of misunderstood items</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low cost per respondent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low cost for geographical dispersion</td>
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<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dane, F.C. (1990)

**Figure 6: Questionnaire methods compared**

This research hoped to discover the importance of the phenomenon from the marketers’ side. It was the opportunity to understand if a phenomenon around Word-of-Mouth was a reality and if the companies were really treated with it. This dissertation will explain thereafter in the ‘Difficulties and Limitations’ part, the possible reasons leading the qualitative part of this research to a failure.
3.7 Results Analysis

According to Saunders et. al. (2012) the different steps in results analysis are:

- Import and check your data on a computer
- Present your data in tables and graphs
- Describe your data choosing appropriate statistics
- Examine relationship choosing appropriate statistics

The different data which have been collected are classified in two different categories. Most of the data are nominal data (or descriptive data) because they cannot be ranked and they cannot be associated with a numeric category (Saunders et. al. 2012, Field 2005). For example, all the data such as gender and age of the participant or even when the participant need to choose the answer fitting his behaviour are nominal data. The other category of data is ordinal data (or ranked data) because they can be ranked in a logic order. For example the data about the number of websites a user usually uses.

To analyse data this dissertation cannot worked with ‘means’ because categorical variables (Field 2005) have been used. Thus, this research worked with ‘frequencies’ and chi-square tests. In this way, the software, IBM SPSS Statistics 20 and Microsoft Excel, have been used. Thanks to SPSS this dissertation got different interesting crosstabs allowing to compare the data collected depending of the gender or the age range for example. Excel allowed storing the data, selecting the data, analysing some data and drawing graphs to present the data.

3.8 Professional, Legal and Ethical Issues

Throughout these researches any professional or legal issues have been involved. The researches, which have been conducted, consisted to gauge public opinion thanks to questionnaire responses about the private opinion and experiences of the respondents. It was also about interviewing some marketing services’ companies.

However, to consider and avoid the probable ethical issues, the answers given by the respondents have been stored anonymously and the data have been stored in safe space to guarantee the confidentiality of each respondent. About the companies’ interviews, the data would have been stored in safe space and the identity of the company would have been published only with its consent. If the companies would have wanted, it was possible for them to consult their data. The data collected regarding the companies’ answers would have been deleted as soon as this
dissertation would have used it. All these steps have been employed in order to respect the data protection law. Moreover to ensure the total confidence of the respondents while they answered the survey, the instructions specified that the data were collected anonymously for the survey and without any commercial use of it.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

Once all the results collected from the survey and from the interviews especially made for the experts, these results were submitted for analysis and interpretation. This chapter will present the different results collected for each question of the survey and then the results collected for the interviews. Regarding the survey, considering the different numbers of respondents for each category (46 males under 30 years old, 21 males over 30 years old, 53 females under 30 years old and 30 females over 30 years old) all the results for the survey will be analysed proportionally to be sure that the results will not be biased by these differences. For example the number of participants answering each question has been taken for 100 participants for each category. In this way, this research considered the exact same number of answers in each category.

The questions and its results will be analysed and presented thanks to SPSS and Excel. Different data will be used depending of the question and the interest of the data collected. In the same way the figures will be presented depending of their interest.

4.2 Survey Results

4.2.1 Gender and Age

This survey was sent to different people without gender or age distinction. However, in the aim to study the difference between male and female, and between the different age categories, the participants have been asked to indicate their gender and their age range. In this questionnaire, the age category was divided in three age ranges, “under 30 years old”, “between 30 years old and 59” and “from 60 years old and over”. These ranges have been selected regarding the Office for the National Statistics (2012). Once the survey’s answers collected, in the aim to have interesting data and due to a lack of answers from “over 60 years old” persons, the range “under 30 over 60 years old” and the range “over 60 years old” have been gathered.

67 males (44.7% of the total) and from 83 females (55.3% of the total) answered this questionnaire. 99 persons who answered the survey were under 30 years old (66% of the total), 42 persons in between 30 years old and 60 years old (28% of the total) and only 9 persons were over 60 years old (6% of the total). The relation between the gender and the age has been as follow: 46 males under 30 years old (30.7% of the total), 19 males between 30 and 59 years old (12.7% of the total), 2
males from 60 years old and over (1.3% of the total), 53 females under 30 years old (35.3% of the total), 23 females between 30 and 59 years old (15.3% of the total) and 7 females from 60 years old and over (4.7% of the total) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Gender and Age repartition

In the following results analysis this paper will now only consider two age ranges, “under 30 years old” and “over 30 years old”.

4.2.2 Question 1

How often do you purchase product(s)/service(s) online?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or three times a month</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a week</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than twice a week</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Frequency of Purchase

Regarding this question without any consideration for gender or age it can be observe that 41.3% of the participants purchase a product or service via e-Commerce websites less than once a month. 36% of the participants purchase it once a month, 18.7% of the participants purchase it two or three times a month, 4% purchase it once or twice a week while in contrast no one would purchase a product or service online more than twice a week. Thus, this result shows that more than 75% of the participants are not buying online product more than once a month.
However when the age of the participants is considered the survey proofed that there is the same number of participants purchasing a product or service less than once a month (44.4% and 44.2% within age). On the contrary, it is important to point out a difference among participants who purchase once a month and two or three times a month. For participants purchasing once a month the result is 33.3% for participants under 30 years old against 41.2% for participants over 30 years old. On the other hand for participants purchasing product or service online more often than once a month the result is 25.2% within age under 30 years old against 17.6% within age over 30 years old. Thus, this paper shows that the participants under 30 years old purchase online products or services more often than the participants over 30 years old.

4.2.3 Question 2

How many different websites do you use for online purchasing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not use any particular website</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one website</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or three different websites</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between four and seven different websites</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than seven different websites</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Number of websites

In a first time this result allows to conclude that the majority of the participants (70% of the total participants) are using between two and seven different websites for online purchasing. Indeed,
11.3% of the total participants do not have any particular website, 4% use only one website, 36.7% use 2 or 3 different websites, 33.3% use between 4 and 7 different websites and 14.7% use more than 7 different websites.

These results can lead this paper to observe that there is an important part of people who do not use any particular website. Considering that, all participants are purchasing products or services online. This result proves that 11.3% of the participants are not loyal to a specific website and that they are probably highly suggestible by advertisements, interesting offers or Word-of-Mouth marketing.

An interesting difference between participants under 30 years old and over 30 years old can be highlighted thanks to this result. The number of participants under 30 years old using two or 3 different websites is more important than for the participants over 30 years old (41.4% against 27.5%), while the reverse is true for the use of more than seven different websites (12.1% against 19.6%).

### 4.2.4 Question 3

The participants are in the following situation: “If you want to purchase a product/service unavailable on your usual website(s)”.

#### 4.2.4.1 Question 3a

How do you find a website?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Seek using a search engine</th>
<th>Ask to a friend, colleague or family member if he/she knows a website</th>
<th>Choose a website from one which you remember from an advertisement</th>
<th>Choose a website from one which you received a referral</th>
<th>Consult social networks, blogs or forums to find a reliable website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of answers:</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;=30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;=30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**: Different ways to find a new website

As these results show it, the number of people using a search engine in the aim to find a website selling the product or service that they are looking for is really high. 84.7% of the total participants recognized to look up on a search engine. The second mainly used way to find a website by the participants is Word-of-Mouth. 45.3% of the participants selected this solution. Then 19.3% of the participants recognized to use forums, blogs or social networks while only 9.3% of the participants
use websites they remember from advertisements, and 6.7% from a referral they received. This result explicitly demonstrates the importance of advice via Word-of-Mouth for the participants when they want to buy a new product or service.

If this paper now focuses on the repartition of the participants for each answer, these results show an important difference between participants under 30 years old and participants over 30 years old for using Word-of-Mouth, and forums or blogs. Indeed, for the use of Word-of-Mouth 55.3% of the participants are under 30 years old and 44.7% are over. For the use of forums and blogs 57.5% of the participants are under 30 years old against 42.5% of the participants over. In this way it appears that participants under 30 years old are more prone to use Word-of-Mouth.

4.2.4.2 Question 3b
Which recommendations will have the most influence for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search engine result</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend, colleague or family member advice</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous advertisement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral that you received</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network, blog or forum advice</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Preference to find a new website

As this result shows it clearly, the number of people favouring advice from their friends, colleagues and family members via Word-of-Mouth is really high compared to the other means (58.7% of the total participants). In second position the search engines are represented with 21.3% of the total
participants. In third position the social networks, blogs or forums advice got 12.7% and then previous advertisements and referral systems got each less than 5% of the total participants’ votes. Thus, it can be concluded that when people are looking for a product or service that they cannot find on their usual websites because this product is not available, or because this kind of product is not sold on their usual websites or even because they don’t have any usual websites (11.3% of the participants – question 2). These persons will favour direct advice from people that they know. Moreover the social networks, forums or blogs advice which are also a kind of Word-of-Mouth got an interesting low score probably due to the lack of reliability from certain forums or blogs were the information published are not at all verified and could be posted by people that the participant does not know.

4.2.4.3 Question 3c
How many different websites would you consult before you choose one?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 website</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 websites</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 websites</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 websites</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and over</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Number of websites consulted before to buy

It can be observed in this result that the majority of the participants are consulting 2 or 3 different websites before to buy a product or service online (22.7% of the participants consult 2 websites and 49.3% of the participants consult 3 websites). Only 5.3% of the participants are buying a product with the first website they consulted. Thus, the e-commerce websites’ users compare the different websites before to buy something and therefore the companies’ marketing service need to convince the users to purchase on their website rather than another one. In this way these results also show that a significant proportion of the participants (13.3%) are comparing many websites (5 or more) before to decide to purchase with one of them.
4.2.5 Question 4

Once you have found a new website selling a product/service that you are seeking what is your next step?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchase it immediately</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verified if the means of payment are secure</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verified the comments that other users could have left on the website</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verified if the reputation of the website within the forums, blogs or through social networks is positive</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss with relatives/friends to get their opinion about the website or the product/service</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Frequency for the different actions before to purchase

For the main part of the respondents it seems that the information collected before to purchase a product or service online come from the information you can find on the website. 60.7% of the total participants consult the comments that other users could have left on the website. That means they are interested in the Word-of-Mouth information that represent this information but do not consider the fact that this information can be biased by the website which control the publication of these comments. The two other Word-of-Mouth information categories are consulted only by approximately 24% of the total participants. However 26.3% of the participants who consulted the comments available on the website also consulted forums, blogs, friends or colleagues. Another noteworthy result in this question is the high rate of male over 30 years old who purchase their products or services as soon as they found it without any other advice or information (43.5% within the gender and age range).

Finally the second most consulted information before to purchase any product or service online are the information related to the means of payment’s safety with 47.3% of the total of the participants. It is still an important point for reliability from the customers’ point of view and it is a good reliability’s indicator for the overall website.

4.2.6 Question 5

You found a new website selling a product/service that you are seeking, but a friend of yours doesn’t recommend this website. What do you do?
How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You start immediately to look for another website</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You ask other relatives their opinion to confirm the previous opinion</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You seek on forums, blogs or social networks other opinions</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You check the website again and buy the product/service anyway</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7:** Consumer behaviour face to negative Word-of-Mouth information

![Bar chart](chart.png)

**Figure 10:** Consumer behaviour face to negative Word-of-Mouth information

(Considering the same number of participants for each category)

The main result of this question is the really low number of participants who are still buying a product or service with a website that they will use for the first time while a friend of them gave them a bad feedback about this website. Thus, it reveals a strong influence for Word-of-Mouth when it is negative information and in this case when the receiver wants to use the website for the first time.

These results also reveal that the males are more likely to look for other information from friends or forums than females who will prefer to find another website.
4.2.7 Question 6

If you are really happy with a website you used for online purchasing, what will you do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If someone asks my opinion I will let him/her know that I likely recommend this website</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will use the website’s form to leave my comments about my purchasing experience</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will go to different forums to share my great purchasing experience</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will say to all my different relatives all the good things I can about this website</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8:** Consumers behaviour after a good purchasing experience

The first noteworthy thing among these data is the high rate of participants who will recommend a website which gave them a good experience if someone asks them their opinion (77.3% of the total participants). Moreover no one is using the forums or blogs to share their experiences.

The second fact that is showed is that people are either one extreme or the other one. Indeed, they will do nothing or they will say it to all their friends, colleagues or family members. Among these extremes the results also show that in the participants doing nothing 41.4% are males over 30 years old and in participants saying it to their relatives they are only 6.9%. Then it can be noticed that in the participants completing the forms about their experience on the website where they bought the product or service, 43.6% are women over 30 years old.

The last fact which can be noticed is the higher number of female participants who are sharing with their friends and colleagues (60.5% are women against 39.5% of men), that confirms one of the literature review information explaining that women are more prone to share their experiences spontaneously (Hofstede 2001, Schumann et. al. 2010).
4.2.8 Question 7:

If you are really unhappy with a website you used for online purchasing, what will you do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If someone asks my opinion I will let him/her know that I have been really disappointed with this website and strongly do not recommend it</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will use the website’s form to leave my comments about my purchasing experience</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will go to different forums to share my opinion about my disappointing purchasing experience</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will say to all my different relatives all the bad things I can about this website</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Consumers behaviour after a bad purchasing experience

As the previous question, this result shows an important number of participants who will give their feedback about their experience if someone asks them. However different interesting facts can be noted here. Firstly the number of the participants who are doing nothing changed from 16.7% of the participants to 4.7% of the participants. Secondly, no one was giving his feedback via forums, blogs or social networks for a good experience while for a bad experience 16.7% of the participants will use it to share their experience. Then, coming to these results it can be noted that all the different ways to share his experience collected more votes for a bad experience than for a good one. In this way this paper can conclude that the bad experiences are more prone to Word-of-Mouth than good experiences. Thus, negative Word-of-Mouth will be more spread than positive Word-of-Mouth.
For bad experiences it could be noted that people spreading their feedback to their friends, colleagues and family members is high with 45.3% of the total participants.

4.2.9 Question 8

If a friend of yours gives you a really bad feedback about a website that you use for online purchasing, what you will do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will trust my friend and stop conducting any business with this website</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will seek another opinion on the web</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will seek another opinion from my friends, colleagues and family members</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will let him know that I never had problems with this website and that it was maybe an exception. I will suggest him to try again to purchase with this website</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will not consider his/her comment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Reaction face to a bad feedback about one of your usual websites

As these results show it, the number of participants who are not considering their friends comments about bad experience is really few, only 5.3% of the total participants. In the same way participants who are considering their friends feedback without any other information and stop conducting any business with a website they use are not very numerous, 18% of the total participants. The main part of the participants (55.3% of the participants) tries to defend their usual website and explain their point of view to their friend.

The part of the participants not considering the feedback is essentially composed by women (70.8% of the participants within this answer). The other results do not show any significant difference between males and females or under and over 30 years old.

4.2.10 Question 9

If a friend of yours gives you a really good feedback about a website with which you previously had a bad experience, what you will do?
How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing

These results show that an important part of the participants are ready to change their mind if their friend gives them more details and success to convince them (48.7% of the total participants). However it can also be notified that a really small part of the participants (3.3% of the total) will clear up their mind without any complementary information. A significant number of participants stay entrenched in their position and will never use the website again (24.7% of the total participants). These two results demonstrate that usually participants are not influenced by good information about a website if they got a bad experience with this last one. This point is visible when the two last questions are compared; the part of participants clearing up their mind when they received positive Word-of-Mouth is 3.3% of the participants against 18% of participants who stop using a website when they received negative Word-of-Mouth. In the same way 5.3% of the participants do not consider at all negative Word-of-Mouth against 24.7% who do not consider positive Word-of-Mouth. Thus, this research concludes against thanks to these results that negative Word-of-Mouth is more powerful than positive Word-of-Mouth.

4.2.11 Question 10

If someone recommends you a website for a product/service that you didn’t planned on buying. What you will do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I trust only my own experience, I will never use this website again</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will strongly advise him not to use it again</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will ask him more details about his/her experience to try to change my mind</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will seek other opinions (web, relatives, etc…) to confirm if I was the exception or if he was it.</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will clear up my opinion and give the website another chance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11:** Reaction face to a good feedback about a website on your black list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will take note about the website in case I need to buy it later</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just consult the website</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it is an attractive price I will buy it</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will ask him to refer the website to me and I will buy it</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 12:** Reaction face to a recommendation for a website
It can be noticed through this result that most of the participants do not consider the recommendation given. 28% of the total participants are not considering the recommendation at all and 48.7% of the participants only take note about the website. Thus, only 23.3% of the participants will consider the recommendation. The result also shows the non-interest of the participants for referral systems. None of the participants selected this answer, but this paper will be back on this point in the next question.

4.2.12 Question 11

If someone sends you a referral for a product/service that you didn’t planned on buying. What you will do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will take note about the website in case I need to buy it later</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just consult the website</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it is an attractive price I will buy it</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will buy it only if there is an award for my friend</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will buy it only if there is an award for me</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will buy it only if there is an award for my friend and for me</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Reaction of participants when the receive a referral

Once again the results show that the number of participants who will use the referral they received is really low, only 8% of the participants use it. The most important part of the participants does not consider at all the referral, 38% of the total participants.

This paper demonstrates the lack of interest of the participants for referral systems. Even when companies are offering rewards for the referred and for the referrer, main of the participants do not use it (only 4.7% of the participants use it).
4.2.13 Question 12

You will give positive or negative Word-of-Mouth (propagation of your opinion):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only for website that you use for online purchasing usually</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As soon as you buy something online</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only if it is positive Word-of-Mouth</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only if it is negative Word-of-Mouth</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 14: Word-of-Mouth propagation*

For this question, the answer which got the higher result is ‘Only for website that you use for online purchasing usually’ with 52.7% of the total participants answering it. For the other behaviour they all got a similar score, around 12% of the answers. The participants who give only negative Word-of-Mouth are males under 30 years old, 52.5% of the respondents who selected this answer are males under 30 years old.

Thus, these results do not confirm the previous conclusions this paper gave before, negative Word-of-Mouth is for this question the least spread by respondents with only 8% of the total respondents. However it is interesting to note that the question was not really well designed because the respondents who selected the ‘Only for website that you use for online purchasing usually’ choice cannot indicate if they will give positive or negative Word-of-Mouth, therefore this paper will not reconsider these question’s conclusions.

4.2.14 Question 13

For which kind of prices do you require Word-of-Mouth?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For all the prices</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From £10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From £100</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From £1000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £10000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 15: Prices ranges to require Word-of-Mouth*

When participants want to buy a product or service online and that they require advice from friends or relatives, most of them do it for any range of prices (66% of the total participants). In the respondents who selected a range the main part selected ‘from £100’. For this answer the two most
participants’ categories represented are the males under 30 years old with 34.1% of the answers and the females over 30 years old with 37.3% of the answers.

4.2.15 Question 14

For which kind of prices will you give Word-of-Mouth?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For all the prices</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From £10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From £100</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From £1000</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £10000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Prices ranges to require Word-of-Mouth

For this question only the participants who did not selected the answer “Never” in the question 12 have been considered. Indeed, this question does not consider participants who never give Word-of-Mouth when they purchase a product or service online. Thus, the number of participants for this question is 133.

Figure 12: Comparison between participants requiring Word-of-Mouth and giving Word-of-Mouth

Through the Figure 12 it is observable that the same amount of participants, who require Word-of-Mouth, also spread Word-of-Mouth when they can. There is exactly the same repartition between the different ranges. Thus, once again the results show that most of the participants do not use any range (72.9% of the participants) and those who use a range of price to give Word-of-Mouth do it for £100 and more.
### 4.2.16 Question 15

If a website for which one you just buy a product/service offer you to refer it to someone else, what you will do?

| Question 15: If a website for which one you just buy a product/service offer you to refer it to someone else, what you will do? |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Answer: I will not do it | I will do it only if I am used to purchase products/services with this website | I will do it only if they offer me an award and that I am happy with my experience | I will do it if they offer me an award even if I am unhappy with my experience | I will do it even if it is the first time I use this website and there is no award |
| Number of answers: | 65 | 33 | 44 | 2 | 6 |
| Male | <30 | 18 | 10 | 14 | 2 | 2 |
| | >=30 | 15 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Female | <30 | 16 | 13 | 23 | 0 | 1 |
| | >=30 | 16 | 7 | 4 | 0 | 3 |

**Table 17: Participants’ behaviour to refer other people**

These results show again the lack of interest of the participants in the referral systems. 43.3% of the participants do not refer the websites to other people. Then, those who refer the websites do it for the websites that they usually use (22% of the participants) and when they are happy and will receive an award (29.3% of the participants).

One of the two notable things is the important part of participants over 30 years old not considering the referral systems (64.3% of the respondents who answered ‘I will not do it’). The second one is the important part of the participants under 30 years old who will consider referral systems only if they are happy with their experience and if they will receive an award (72.8% of the respondents who answered ‘I will do it only if they offer me an award and that I am happy with my experience’).
experience’).

### 4.2.17 Question 16

Which kind of marketing is for you the most attractive and influencing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements (TV, Radio, Tracts, Flyers)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial emails</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums, Blogs, Social networks information</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-Mouth (advice from another person)</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 18: Most attractive and influencing marketing tool**

This final question allows this research to take comfort in the idea that Word-of-Mouth Marketing is nowadays one of the main tools in marketing. With 55.3% of the respondents’ votes, Word-of-Mouth appears that the most attractive and most influencing marketing tool. This tool is almost twice more important than classic marketing such as advertisements which got only 29.3% of the participants’ votes. Moreover, considering all the different kinds of Word-of-Mouth (Forums, blogs, social network information and advice from another person) the difference is more significant, 67.3% of the total participants against 32.7% of the participants for the standard marketing (advertisements and commercial emails).

As it was predictable the commercial emails got a really bad score (3.3% of the participants’ votes) probably due to a bad image, a too intrusive aspect and a bad perception of this marketing tool by the respondents.

### 4.3 Experts’ interviews results

Due to a lack of answers from the British and French companies about this research’s request to get an interview, it is impossible for this dissertation to analyse the results this research could have get. However it is interesting to analyse the different questions and why those questions have been selected.
4.3.1 Question 1

Which marketing tools do you use in your marketing processes?

This interview’s questionnaire has been fitted for marketing teams and in the aim to understand the marketing process from the different companies. In this way this question seemed to be the most important to start this questionnaire.

The only information this research got concerning this question are the different traditional marketing tools already listed in the Literature Review. Moreover with some other researches it is possible to note that for most of the companies contacted there are some very popular TV advertisements existing (Table 19). However it could have been interesting for this dissertation to know the less popular standard marketing tools used by these different companies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>TV Advertisement link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarenza</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vs2cdcTT7po">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vs2cdcTT7po</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z78spq-Gppw">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z78spq-Gppw</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebay</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X5Ar2o9pjU&amp;NR=1&amp;feature=endscreen">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X5Ar2o9pjU&amp;NR=1&amp;feature=endscreen</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Minister</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYiblqBVC&amp;M&amp;feature=plcp">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYiblqBVC&amp;M&amp;feature=plcp</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASOS</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSeJaDyZBlA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSeJaDyZBlA</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groupon</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns9F0Bckho0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns9F0Bckho0</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mister Good Deal</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGgOxKdplkE0A3AD9F720&amp;feature=results_video">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGgOxKdplkE0A3AD9F720&amp;feature=results_video</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Redoute</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4rUC3WqmU">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4rUC3WqmU</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argos</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2ij7LCDkK4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2ij7LCDkK4</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TopShop</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fr_j1-d-56A">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fr_j1-d-56A</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 19**: Companies with their TV advertisement

4.3.2 Question 2:

For you, what are the main tools in Word-of-Mouth marketing? (Blogs and forums articles, Referral programs, Satisfaction forms, People advising other people about your brand, people transferring a website to their friends, etc…) Which ones of the Word-of-Mouth tools do you use in your company?

This question has been fitted to focus on the different Word-of-Mouth marketing tools used in the different companies and to know which ones are the most popular and efficient for the interviewees. Once again the only information collected about this question come from the information treated in the Literature Review but also from the different researches done about the different companies contacted. This dissertation noted the prominence given to Facebook for the different companies.
Indeed, most of the companies contacted have a Facebook’s page and give the possibility to their customers to ‘like’ their Facebook’s page. It is possible to observe the important number of ‘likes’ collected by the different companies (Table 20). Another Word-of-Mouth marketing tools used by most of the different companies and observed by this dissertation are:

- The possibility to give his opinion online after a purchase
- The possibility for a user to send a link to a product or service of the website to someone
- The possibility to refer the website to someone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Facebook’s page 'likes'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vente Privée</td>
<td>20574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarenza</td>
<td>95103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon</td>
<td>8403051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebay</td>
<td>3484118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Mnister</td>
<td>135818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASOS</td>
<td>1811321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pixmania</td>
<td>52216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goupon</td>
<td>2100000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mister Good Deal</td>
<td>17033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Redoute</td>
<td>896617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play.com</td>
<td>349445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golfbuyitonline</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curry's Digital</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argos</td>
<td>487342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TopShop</td>
<td>2462447</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Number of ‘likes’ collected by the Facebook’s pages on the 09/08/2012

4.3.3 Question 3:

Is it important to consider Word-of-Mouth marketing (from your point of view)? Why? What are the positive and the negative aspects?

This dissertation showed in the Literature Review that a lot of different authors agreed that Word-of-Mouth phenomenon and the marketing tools associated need to be considered. This question has been fitted to verify this point. However this dissertation does not have the possibility to confirm or not this hypothesis without any answer and opinion from the companies.

4.3.4 Question 4:

Do you think that you are giving an important place to this marketing tool in your company? If not, do you think it should be done?
Once again except the information collected about the companies and listed in the question 2 (4.3.2) this dissertation did not collect any interesting information about this point and will not be able to answer this question.

4.3.5 **Question 5:**

Why do you think people are/would be more sensitive to Word-of-Mouth marketing?  
Or why do you think people are not/wouldn’t be sensitive to Word-of-Mouth marketing?

As this dissertation already said it before, customers should be more sensitive to Word-of-Mouth Marketing due to the origin of the data and their reliability. The importance of the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon is difficult to measure but it is possible to observe its extended around the world as the Literature Review and the survey’s results revealed it. The WOMMA (Word Of Mouth Marketing Association) is an association created in 2004 which prone “Word of mouth as a solution to business challenges” (womma.org/about/2012) and which demonstrates all the importance of word-of-mouth marketing in the current market. Consumers and companies can find different interesting information and webinars (online seminars) advocating the interest of Word-of-Mouth Marketing. The creation of such an association is a proof of the importance of the phenomenon and the power that Word-of-Mouth marketing can exert over consumers. This question’s answers should have given to this dissertation the real opinion from the marketing teams and confirm or not the possible power of the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon for professionals.

4.3.6 **Question 6-7:**

- Do you think the Internet has influenced customers’ behaviours about Word-of-Mouth?

- What are the different adaptations your company did in marketing after the arrival of the Internet?

According to the literature review and the other interview’s questions it seems obvious that the development of the Internet fostered the Word-of-Mouth phenomenon’s development. The development of the Internet developed an always better communication between people and the communication is the basis for Word-of-Mouth. Moreover the Internet brought new tools for Word-of-Mouth marketing such as the social networks, the forums or the possibility given to people to
communicate via chat for example. In this way it would have been interesting to know the different consequences the Internet got for the different marketing teams and how they adapted their marketing behaviours.

4.3.7 Question 8:

What do you think about referral system? (Efficient, expansive, profitable, etc…)

This question was asked considering the important place done to this tool in the articles the Literature Review treated. However this interest for this tool was not the same for the results got from the survey. Indeed, the survey’s results showed a lack of interest in the referral system tool for the respondents. Thus, it could have been really interesting to have professional points of view to be able to compare it with the customers’ behaviors.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

5.1 Dissertation summary

This dissertation was divided in different parts to ensure a good understanding of the research processes and results. Firstly, thanks to the literature review this paper studied the different parts of this dissertation’s topic and gives the opportunity to well understand the different issues for this research. Secondly, thanks to the research methodology chapter this paper gave all the different necessary information to understand how and why the different research methods were used and how they will serve the research questions’ solving. This different information also gives the opportunity to measure the reliability of this study. The final important chapter is the results analysis one. This chapter analysed all the different information collected with the survey or with the interviews. It is one of the most important; it gave to this research the opportunity to confirm the literature review information, or in the other way to demonstrate that different information and conclusions showed the opposite. These demonstrations have been done thanks to information collected via the mix methods research. Moreover it led this dissertation to answer the research questions and to meet the aims and objectives.

5.2 Findings Summary

The first information this paper extracted from the findings is the confirmation that Word-of-Mouth is well a really powerful tool. Indeed, the information published by Schumann et. al. (2010) which reveals that customers consult their family and friends before to purchase a product is true; this research collected from the survey a high result for the Word-of-Mouth choice as the tool they use the most before to purchase a product or service. In addition the tool which has the most influence on the consumers’ behaviour is also Word-of-Mouth. In their studies Bughin et. al. (2010) revealed that Word-of-Mouth is responsible for 20-50% of purchase decision. This dissertation’s survey revealed that more than 55% of the participants consider that Word-of-Mouth is the tool which influences the most their behaviour. In this way this paper confirms that Word-of-Mouth is an important tool for purchase decision and that it needs to be considered as an important phenomenon.

The second information this paper extracted from the findings is another confirmation of the literature review’s information about the powerful of the negative Word-of-Mouth. Indeed, different
authors agreed with the fact that negative Word-of-Mouth is more influential and powerful than positive Word-of-Mouth (Blythe 2008, Breazeale 2009, Trusov et. al. 2009) and this point was verified different times throughout this dissertation. It was verified thanks to the survey and more precisely the questions 5, 6, 7 & 9. For example the first information concerning the purchase with a new website showed a strong influence for negative Word-of-Mouth on the customers. That confirms Bughin et. al.'s (2010) information. The second information came from the comparison of the reaction of the consumers to spread Word-of-Mouth when they had a good experience and when they had a bad experience. This comparison showed that the number of persons doing nothing decrease strongly when it is a bad experience, therefore when it will be negative Word-of-Mouth. It also showed that people are giving their opinion spontaneously and use more different tools to spread Word-of-Mouth, such as forums and blogs. In this way this paper can consider the important behaviour’s difference from the customers depending of their experience. Negative Word-of-Mouth is well more powerful than positive Word-of-Mouth. This different information well answered the first and the second aims of this dissertation which was to investigate the interest of the consumers in Word-of-Mouth and the effects and factors influencing this interest.

The third information this paper extracted from the findings is not completely a confirmation of the information collected in the literature review. The fact that traditional marketing needs to improve its communication part such as public relation, which includes Word-of-Mouth Marketing, is true. The participants showed an important disinterest for the classic marketing tools and showed their growing interest for Word-of-Mouth Marketing. Indeed, this tool is well more credible for the customers than traditional marketing tools (Harris Interactive 2006).

The other point is the non-interest of the customers for e-Word-of-Mouth and e-Word-of-Mouth Marketing. According to Strutton et. al. (2011) e-Word-of-Mouth is a weapon for firms but this research proved the opposite. Indeed, the survey’s results showed that the commercial emails and the forums or blogs information do not interest the customers and do not get their confidence. That is probably due to the lack of reliability from these sources and the bad aspects these tools got. That could be an interesting future research. In this way the marketers still need to handle the e-Word-of-Mouth phenomenon to be able to use it in their favour.

The fourth information this paper extracted from the findings is not a confirmation of the literature review’s information. The fact that referral systems are really appreciate by customers and that in this way companies need to spend a lot of money in these systems (Biyalogorsky et. al. 2001, Schumann et. al. 2010) is wrong according to this research survey’s results. Indeed, the question 15
showed that almost half of the participants do not consider the possibility to refer to someone else when companies offer them. In addition, according to the question 11 38% of the participants do not consider at all the referral they receive. The try to motivate customers with award to refer the website they used improves the capacity for people to refer but it is not a real success, 31% of the participants only are motivated by the award to refer to someone else the website where they bought a product or service. This different information answered the third aim of this dissertation which was to investigate the marketing behaviour of the companies. Even if this dissertation did not receive any answer from the companies for the interviews, the survey’s answers and the different researches allowed better understanding the marketing behaviour of the companies.

The last information this paper extracted from the findings is that depending of their gender and age, the participants have different behaviours. For example the participants under 30 years old are more prone to purchase products or services online and to share information thanks to Word-of-Mouth, forums or blogs. Another difference includes the gender, instead as Hofstede (2001) and Schumann et. al. (2010) said it the girls are more prone to social ties and rumours. Thus, they are sharing the information they got about online purchasing experience more easily (Survey - Question 6). On the other hand males more often do not consider the information they got and will buy the product anyway (Survey – Question 4). This last point is especially true for males over 30 years old. Thus, the information according to Schumann et. al. (2010) revealing that gender only influences the way to perceive but not influence Word-of-Mouth seems wrong according this research. This last information brought additional answer to the second aim which was to investigate the factors influencing Word-of-Mouth.

In conclusion of this dissertation a lot of interesting things where studied and were confirmed or discovered. Different points gave the possibility to confirm the information collected in the literature review and others allowed challenging this information. This dissertation tried to give an answer to the different research questions and to meet the different aims and objectives fixed. Even if these research’s questions cannot be answered with a simple answer this research led to give answers’ parts and helped to understand ‘How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing’.
CHAPTER VI: LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

6.1 Difficulties and Limitations

The main difficulties this dissertation met during the research were due to the lack of answer from the samples. During the first round of spreading the survey only 100 answers were collected and it is only after posting again an ad on the social networks that 50 other answers have been collected to get the 150 total answers. Regarding the expert interviews the problem came from the fact that a lot of companies did not answer the request to have an interview with a member of their marketing team, and also from the negative answers this dissertation has received. This dissertation was actually hoping 5 different companies’ interviews but did not get any interview with any company. The lack of time and the unfavourable timing due to summer holidays disadvantaged this dissertation to get experts’ answers. Indeed, a lot of employees are not available during summer holidays and the other employees still working often need to compensate the absence of their colleague and do not have any available time for this kind of interview. A better timing and a longer time to realize the interviews might be allowed to get some answers from the companies.

The other difficulties this dissertation met were due to the need to be sure that the data collected would not be biased. To ensure that, many things needed to be really clear. For instance, good instructions allow the participants to be aware about what they are supposed to do and ensure they will answer the survey properly (Dane 1990). Another example is to be sure that the questions are well designed and that the participants will well understand it and will have the good answer choice. The last difficulty this dissertation met was due to the need of reliability and trustworthiness for the survey and for the questionnaire interview, to attract people and be sure that they would be confident to answer properly the questions. Maybe it is one of the reasons leading the interview designed for experts to a failure.

6.2 Further Research

This dissertation has different advice for further researches. The first and main future research which could be done is to find enough companies to get the most possible interesting answers for the expert’s interview. To get these necessary answers it could be interesting to have a bigger
professional network to be able to contact more easily and more efficiently the companies. Another point to get more answers and to study their differences could be to contact companies in other countries than United Kingdom and France. Indeed, it could be interesting to get answers for the experts’ interviews, but also for the survey, from oriental countries, Asian countries and African countries for example.

This dissertation has been written to foster Word-of-Mouth, to bring arguments in the aim to push companies to use Word-of-Mouth marketing and to explain why companies should use it considering Word-of-Mouth’s power. However another point of view could have been used to write this dissertation. It could be interesting to write this dissertation with the consumer point of view. To present the arguments pushing the consumers to be vigilant and do not be fooled by the marketing strategies which try to push them to consume always more using all the different ways they can.

The last advice for further researches this dissertation can give is the dissociation between the products and the services. Indeed, this dissertation considered that products and services would be considered as equal and none difference would not be done. However it could be really interesting to study the differences done by the consumers and the marketers depending if it is a product or a service. Other differences could be studied are the differences depending of the kind of products and the kind of services.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey’s Respondents Contact Email

Dear friends and colleagues,
I'm currently doing my master dissertation and I need some help from you. Could you please complete this survey, it would take you approxiatively 5min and would be very helpful for me. If you can and have the opportunity please, spread it around you! Thanks a lot in advance!

Chers amis et collègues,
Je suis actuellement en train de réaliser ma dissertation de fin d'étude et j'ai besoin de vous!
Pouvez vous s'il vous plaît réaliser ce sondage qui ne vous demandera que 5 minutes de votre temps et qui me sera très utile. De plus merci de bien vouloir le faire circuler autour de vous si vous en avez la possibilité.
Un grand merci d’avance!

http://www2.macs.hw.ac.uk/~bjb7/Survey/welcome.php

--
Baptiste Beauchamps

MSc Information Technology & Business - Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh
ENSEEIHT 2012 - Informatique et Mathématiques Appliqués
Welcome to my online survey for my postgrade dissertation!

This is an anonymous survey, you will be asked to answer to 20 short questions with unique or multiple answers.
For the unique answers you just need to select what is the best choice for you.
For the multiple answers you can select the different options corresponding to your behaviour. However you need to select at least one answer.

Your answers will be conserved for a research dissertation and used for analysis. None of these information will be communicated to third people or used for commercial use. The information will be kept safely and anonymously.
For any queries about the process, please contact me via the form "contact me" on the left of the screen.

Please select your language:

- English
- French
How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing

Step 1

Gender: ● Male ● Female
Age: ● Under 30 years old ● 30 - 59 years old ● Over 60 years old

Question 1:
How often do you purchase product(s)/service(s) online?
● Less than once a month
● Once a month
● Two or three times a month
● Once or twice a week
● More than twice a week

Question 2:
How many different websites do you use for online purchasing?
● I do not use any particular website
● Only one website
● Two or three different websites
● Between four and seven different websites
● More than seven different websites
Step 2

Question 3: If you want to purchase a product/service unavailable on your usual website(s):

a) How do you find a website?
   - Seek using a search engine
   - Ask to a friend, colleague or family member if he/she knows a website
   - Choose a website from one which you remember from an advertisement
   - Choose a website from one which you received a referral
   - Consult social networks, blogs or forums to find a reliable website

b) Which recommendations will have the most influence for you?
   - Search engine result
   - Friend, colleague or family member advice
   - Previous advertisement
   - Referral that you received
   - Social network, blog or forum advice

c) How many different websites would you consult before you choose one:
   - 1 website
   - 2 websites
   - 3 websites
   - 4 websites
   - 5 or more

Question 4:

Once you have found a new website selling a product/service that you are seeking what is your next step?
   - Purchase it immediately
   - Verified if the means of payment are secure
   - Verified the comments that other users could have left on the website
   - Verified if the reputation of the website within the forums, blogs or through social networks is positive
   - Discuss with relatives/friends to get their opinion about the website or the product/service

Question 5:

You found a new website selling a product/service that you are seeking, but a friend of yours doesn’t recommend this website. What do you do?
   - You start immediately to look for another website
   - You ask other relatives their opinion to confirm the previous opinion
   - You seek on forums, blogs or social networks other opinions
   - You check the website again and buy the product/service anyway
Step 3

Question 6:
If you are really happy with a website you used for online purchasing, what will you do?
- Nothing
- If someone asks my opinion I will let him/her know that I likely recommend this website
- I will use the website’s form to leave my comments about my purchasing experience
- I will go to different forums to share my great purchasing experience
- I will say to all my different relatives all the good things I can about this website

Question 7:
If you are really unhappy with a website you used for online purchasing, what will you do?
- Nothing
- If someone asks my opinion I will let him/her know that I have been really disappointed with this website and strongly do not recommend it
- I will use the website’s form to leave my comments about my purchasing experience
- I will go to different forums to share my opinion about my disappointing purchasing experience
- I will say to all my different relatives all the bad things I can about this website

Question 8:
If a friend of yours gives you a really bad feedback about a website that you use for online purchasing, what will you do?
- I will trust my friend and stop conducting any business with this website
- I will seek another opinion on the web
- I will seek another opinion from my friends, colleagues and family members
- I will let him know that I never had problems with this website and that it was maybe an exception. I will suggest him to try again to purchase with this website
- I will not consider his/her comment

Question 9:
If a friend of yours gives you a really good feedback about a website with which you previously had a bad experience, what will you do?
- I trust only my own experience, I will never use this website again
- I will strongly advise him not to use it again
- I will ask him more details about his/her experience to try to change my mind
- I will seek other opinions (web, relatives, etc...) to confirm if I was the exception or if he was it.
- I will clear up my opinion and give the website another chance

Question 10:
If someone recommends you a website for a product/service that you didn’t planned on buying. What you will do?
- Nothing
- I will take note about the website in case I need to buy it later
- Just consult the website
- If it is an attractive price I will buy it
- I will ask him to refer the website to me and I will buy it
Step 4

Question 11:
If someone sends you a referral for a product/service that you didn’t planned on buying. What you will do?
- Nothing
- I will take note about the website in case I need to buy it later
- Just consult the website
- If it is an attractive price I will buy it
- I will buy it only if there is an award for my friend
- I will buy it only if there is an award for me
- I will buy it only if there is an award for my friend and for me

Question 12:
You will give positive or negative Word-of-Mouth (propagation of your opinion):
- Only for website that you use for online purchasing usually
- As soon as you buy something online
- Only if it is positive Word-of-Mouth
- Only if it is negative Word-of-Mouth
- Never

Question 13:
For which kind of prices do you require Word-of-Mouth?
- For all the prices
- From £10
- From £100
- From £1000
- Over £10000

Question 14:
For which kind of prices will you give Word-of-Mouth?
- For all prices
- From £10
- From £100
- From £1000
- Over £10000

Question 15:
If a website for which one you just buy a product/service offer you to refer it to someone else, what you will do?
- I will not do it
- I will do it only if I am used to purchase products/services with this website
- I will do it only if they offer me an award and that I am happy with my experience
- I will do it if they offer me an award even if I am unhappy with my experience
- I will do it even if it is the first time I use this website and there is no award
How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing

Question 16:
Which kind of marketing is for you the most attractive and influencing?
- Advertisements (TV, Radio, Tracts, Flyers)
- Commercial emails
- Forums, Blogs, Social networks information
- Word-of-Mouth (advice from another person)

Question 17:
If you are aware of a different method which marketers can use to influence you to buy a product/service please indicate it here:
None

PROCESS
- Step 1
- Step 2
- Step 3
- Step 4
- End
- Contact me

Thanks for completing my survey, your answers will now be stored anonymously and safely. If you have any comments about the survey's topic or about the survey, feel free to use this area to let me know.

Submit

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Appendix C: Interview’s Contact Email

Master's dissertation - Expert interview

baptiste beauchamps <baptiste.beauchamps@wanadoo.fr> 9 juillet 2012 14:00
À : sarah.graham@topshop.com

Dear Sarah Graham,

Following our call from this morning I’m writting you this email.
I am a postgraduate student. I am currently doing my Master’s dissertation and I would like to have your help concerning it. I know that your time is really precious but I realized a questionnaire to have an expert opinion and I would really appreciate if you can answer it.

It’s really short (only 8 questions) and it would be really helpful for me. I am available to give you any other information about it. The questions could be stored anonymously if you want it.

Thanks a lot in advance.

Best regards,

--

Baptiste Beauchamps

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ENSEEIHT 2012 - Informatique et Mathématiques Appliqués

Appendix D: Expert’s Interview Questionnaire

My dissertation topic is “How and why informal communication such as Word-of-Mouth marketing can improve standard marketing.”

Question 1:
Which marketing tools do you use in your marketing processes?

->

Question 2:
For you, what are the main tools in Word-of-Mouth marketing? (Blogs and forums articles, Referral programs, Satisfaction forms, People advising other people about your brand, people transferring a website to their friends, etc…) Which ones of the Word-of-Mouth tools do you use in your company?

->
**Question 3:**
Is it important to consider Word-of-Mouth marketing (from your point of view)? Why?
What are the positive and the negative aspects?

->

**Question 4:**
Do you think that you are giving an important place to this marketing tool in your company?
If not, do you think it should be done?

->

**Question 5:**
Why do you think people are/would be more sensitive to Word-of-Mouth marketing?
Or why do you think people are not/wouldn’t be sensitive to Word-of-Mouth marketing?

->

**Question 6:**
Do you think Internet has influenced customers’ behaviours about Word-of-Mouth?

->

**Question 7:**
What are the different adaptations your company did in marketing after the arrival of Internet?

->

**Question 8:**
What do you think about referral system? (Efficient, expansive, profitable, etc…)

->