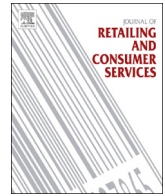




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## Consumers' motives for visiting a food retailer's Facebook page

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify consumers' motives for visiting the Facebook page of a food retail chain. Data were collected using an online survey of 1208 members of the FB page of a Canadian food retail chain. The results show that respondents' main motives are to obtain information on discounted items, consult recommended recipes, enter contests, and learn about new products available in-store. Analyses identify informative, dynamism, and enjoyment values as the most important motives that influence attitudes toward the food retail chain's FB page. A further qualitative analysis of the FB pages of four supermarket chains supports these results.

## 1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) are electronic platforms that allow users to create their profiles, share photos, images and texts, and develop and maintain connections with other users. SNSs, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace, have changed the way people/customers communicate with each other and with businesses (Dijkmans et al., 2015). They play an important role in everyday life and have undergone remarkable global expansion and growth (Gangadharbatla et al., 2012).

Facebook is the leading social network platform, with 2.13 billion monthly active users worldwide as of December 2017 (Facebook, 2017). It is the second most trafficked website after Google.com (Alhabash et al., 2014). In 2013, 70% of Fortune 500 companies had a Facebook page and 96% of Fortune 500 companies in the specialty retail industry used Facebook (Barnes et al., 2013). Facebook is essential to social media marketing success (eMarketer, 2016). Almost all social media marketers (95.8%) believe FB generates the best ROI (eMarketer, 2016). Facebook is the preferred social media platform for business-to-customer relationships, LinkedIn is the most popular platform for business-to-business relations, and Twitter is the favourite among young people who value short communications (Gamboia and Goncalves, 2014).

Marketers have identified SNSs as important platforms that facilitate interactions between companies/brands and consumers, foster customer engagement, and develop social commerce, (Gangadharbatla et al., 2012; Ng, 2016; Pongpaew et al., 2017). SNSs enhance rich and vivid communication through text, sound, image, and video

(Gangadharbatla et al., 2012). In addition, social networking enables businesses to have easier access to buyers and target audiences, and to learn about consumer needs and consumer trends. Social media, including Facebook, have changed marketing communication practices and companies need to optimize their use of this popular communication channel. Interactions through social media allow the development of bidirectional relationships between businesses and customers. However, business managers have much less control over the scope of their communications, as new tools allow consumers to appropriate this content in various ways, causing a transfer of power. Furthermore, the implementation of a social media strategy is driven by industry-specific characteristics (Bruhn et al., 2012). The relative effect of brand-created social media communications and user-generated social media communications on brand equity is industry dependent (Bruhn et al., 2012).

Despite the importance of Facebook in the business world, it is still difficult to evaluate the real effect of a company's presence on the network. Many companies use web metrics such as sales, number of fans, number and frequency of feedbacks, and time spent on a site to assess the usefulness of their presence on SNSs. In addition, their presence on web 2.0 can be evaluated by assessing brand relationship development, consumer engagement, brand image, and company reputation (Beukeboom et al., 2015; de Vries et al., 2017; Dijkmans et al., 2015). Facebook marketing efforts do not necessarily translate into direct actions such as purchase, but may influence intangible aspects of the brand. Also, they may create and develop interactions between the brand and customers, and lead to more positive word-of-mouth behavior.

Although there is an increasing number of companies present on

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social media, they do not necessarily understand how to optimize their presence on these platforms. A study by the [IBM Institute for Business Value \(2011\)](#) shows an important gap between why businesses think consumers are following them on social media and what really motivates consumers to interact with companies and brands on social media. While companies invest in developing relationship with customers on social media platforms and design effective strategies, they need to understand customer needs, and particularly what motivate their visits to these platforms and their interactions with them.

Scholars have not paid a great deal of attention to the presence of food retail chains on social media networks. In Canada, the context of this study, six chains (Loblaws, Sobeys, Metro, Costco, Walmart, and Safeway Canada) control about 90% of the food market. Food retailing is a vital sector, and consumers are becoming more demanding in terms of food quality and information. Many of these chains make extensive use of digital strategies (website, social networks, and mobile marketing). In the province of Quebec, Metro and IGA (Sobeys) have more than 325,000 and 225,000 fans on their respective Facebook pages. Metro's website alone offers more than 4500 recipes ([Canadian Grocer, 2014](#)).

With the increased use of Facebook in the food retail sector, it has become increasingly important for companies operating in the industry to understand why consumers visit their FB pages and what can be done to increase the effectiveness of their FB use. From a theoretical standpoint, our knowledge of the effective use of FB (and SNSs in general) and of FB's role in building brands ([Langaro et al., 2015](#)) remains limited. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate consumers' motives for visiting the Facebook page of a food chain retailer.

## 2. Facebook user motivations

Recent literature reports that Facebook is used for self-presentation, connection and communication, friendship formation and maintenance, information and photo sharing, photo posting and commenting, profile viewing, entertainment/distraction, escapism, and fulfillment of the desire to belong to a group (e.g., [Alhabash et al., 2014](#); [Gangadharbatla et al., 2012](#); [Pöyry et al., 2013](#); [Ng, 2016](#)).

Scholars argue that motivations of individuals' use of technology such as the Internet and SNSs are both cognitive and affective ([Kim et al., 2007](#)). Cognitive or extrinsic motives for using Facebook are related to the usefulness of the platform for sharing information and maintaining relationships. Affective or intrinsic motivations refer to the enjoyment and fun generated by using Facebook. For instance, [Lin and Lu \(2011\)](#) find that enjoyment is the most important predictor of intention to use Facebook, followed by social presence and usefulness. Also, continued intention to use FB increases when users realize that many friends and acquaintances are also using FB. The results are supported by [Alhabash et al. \(2014\)](#) who report that information sharing, self-documentation, socialization, entertainment, escapism, self-expression, and medium appeal are all significant predictors of FB use intensity, with entertainment as the strongest predictor. Recently, [Ng \(2016\)](#) identified five factors that influence consumers' participation in commercial activities on Facebook. These motives are self-presentation, convenience, enjoyment, social influence, and perceived risk.

Despite the increasing use of Facebook, there is a lack of theoretical and empirical studies about the benefits of this social media for users and the opportunities for service organizations such as retailers. [Park and Kim \(2014\)](#) identify four benefits of a brand's social network website: informational benefits (e.g., obtaining information from a brand's FB page), hedonic benefits (e.g., enjoying browsing and participating in a brand's FB page), social benefits (e.g., interacting with others members or consumers), and economic benefits (e.g., discounts, coupons). They provide evidence that experiential benefits (i.e., social, interactive and entertaining environment) have a positive effect on a brand's social network relationship quality. However, function or

tangible benefits are not found to have any significant influence on a brand's social relationship quality. A study conducted by the [IBM Institute for Business Value \(2011\)](#) reports that "getting discounts or coupons," "purchasing products and services," and "reading reviews and product rankings" are the most important reasons for interacting with brand or business via social media networks. In terms of consumers' online brand-related activities, [Muntinga et al. \(2011\)](#) identify three groups of Facebook users corresponding to three levels of activity: consuming (i.e., the lowest level of brand-related activeness), contributing, and creating (i.e., the highest level of brand-related activeness). Consumers passively browse brand-related information (e.g., reading product reviews) without any substantial engagement. Contributors respond to brand posts, converse with other fans about brands, and rate brand-related videos. Creators write, post, and share product and brand-related content in their profiles. These brand-related activities are driven by various motivations such as information, entertainment, remuneration, integration and social interaction, and empowerment. In a recent study, [Lim and Kumar \(2018\)](#) report that information (e.g., timely, valuable, useful), incentives (e.g., coupons and offers), entertainment (e.g., entertaining, enjoyable) and connectedness (e.g., ability to interact and know other people who like the company) are the main consumer motivations for participating in brand online social networking. The results show that participants' entertainment gratification and need for connectedness both strengthen their likelihood of commitment to brand online social networking, which in turn increases brand attachment.

Although food retail chains may have different positioning strategies and communication objectives, the proposed content on their FB pages is somewhat similar. Generally, the FB page of a food retail chain presents some information about the company and provides a link to its website. Chains also post recipes with pictures, provide information about new products, organize contests, post puzzles and quizzes, ask users for feedback on posted recipes, and answer users' questions to alleviate their concerns. Posts on the FB pages of food retail chains can be classified into two categories: those initiated by the company to inform consumers or start a discussion and those instigated spontaneously by consumers to ask a question or add a comment. When the company initiates the discussion, it tries to capture members' attention by publishing a picture of a product, asking questions about recipes, or inviting members to participate in a contest. Members' posts may take many forms, including comments on the products they like or those no longer available in stores; questions about the origin of products (e.g., local fruits and vegetables) and their characteristics (e.g., organic, gluten-free); inquiries about product labeling or complaints about product quality (e.g., posting photos of expired products); expressions of dissatisfaction with the service provided by a store and its employees (e.g., lack of courtesy, poor product knowledge, improper packaging purchases); questions about contest rules and promotions; product suggestions; messages of support reflecting consumers' attachment to the company; and answers to other customers' questions.

## 3. Research methodology

This paper combines a quantitative study with a qualitative one. The objective of the quantitative study is to assess the relative importance of different motives for visiting the FB pages of food retailers. Data were collected using a questionnaire administered to FB members of food retail chains. The qualitative study analyzed the publications of four food retail chains on their FB pages and the reactions of members.

### 3.1. Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed to assess consumers' motives for visiting the FB page of a Canadian food retail chain. The first section of the questionnaire is about respondents' socio-demographic and online behavioral characteristics, including their FB use. The second section

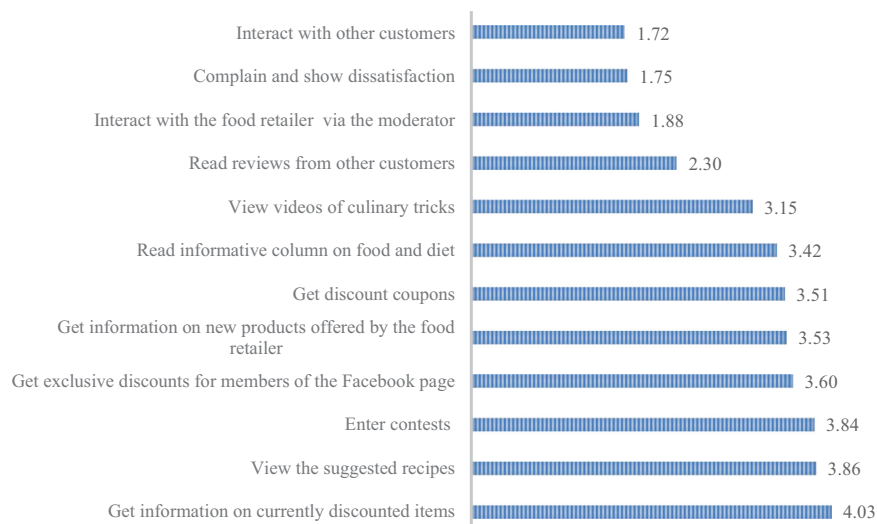


Fig. 1. Motives for visiting the food retail chain's FB page.

comprises twelve motives for visiting the FB page of a food retail chain: get information on currently discounted items, view the suggested recipes, enter contests, get exclusive discounts for users of the Facebook page, get information on new products offered by the retailer, get discount coupons, read informative columns on food and diet, view videos of culinary tricks, read reviews from other customers, complain and show dissatisfaction, and interact with other customers. The motives were measured on a five-item Likert-type scale (1 “strongly disagree”; 5 “strongly agree”). All of them were derived from previous research on reasons of interacting with companies via SNS (e.g., [IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011](#)) and content analysis of FB pages of food retail chains. Two experts in the food retail sector, including a food retail chain SNS communication manager, examined and approved these motives.

A third section of the questionnaire was designed to measure respondents' attitudes toward the FB page of the food retail chain and their perception of its benefits (i.e., their perception of the dynamism, entertainment value and informative content of the FB page, as well as the reactivity of the FB page moderator). Respondents' attitudes toward the FB page were measured with one item: “I like the Facebook page of the ... food retailer chain.” The measure of FB benefits was based on previous work on website perception ([Chen and Wells, 1999](#); [Kim and Stoel, 2004](#); [Ladhari, 2010](#)). Three items were used to measure the informative value/content of the FB page: “The information is of good quality”; “The information is well presented”; “The information is easy to find.”. Three items were used to measure the reactivity of the moderator: “The moderator is friendly”; “The answers/solutions proposed by the moderator are relevant”; “The moderator promptly answers questions.” Single items were used to measure the entertaining value and the dynamism of the FB page: “The Facebook page is entertaining”; “The Facebook page is dynamic (the information is regularly updated).” Finally, the questionnaire included a four-item measure of the image of the food retail chain: “Since I visited the FB page, my opinion about the food retail chain has improved”; “The Facebook page reinforces the image I have about the food retail chain”; “The Facebook page matches the image I have about the food retail chain”; and “The Facebook page gives a good image of the food retail chain.”.

### 3.2. Sample characteristics

To collect data, two Canadian food retail chains were approached; one of them agreed to post the survey link on its FB page. This chain is one of the three main food retailers in the country. After a period of two weeks, 1208 people had completed the questionnaire. The majority of

them were female (89.6%). In terms of age, 41.8% were 18–34 years old, 42.5% were 35–54 years old, and 15.7% were 55 years old and over. Only 14.2% of the respondents lived alone. As for income, 31.4% per cent had an annual income of less than CAD\$40,000, 41.8% per cent had an annual income of CAD\$40,000 to CAD\$79,999, and 26.8% had an annual income of more than CAD\$80,000.

The majority of respondents (69.9%) were the primary grocery purchasers for their households. In terms of average weekly spending on groceries, 26.3% of the respondents spent less than CAD\$100, 57.5% spent CAD\$100 to \$199, and 16.2% spent CAD\$200 or more. Of the sample, 92.9% of respondents had made purchases in at least one of the stores of the food retail chain selected for this study. Additionally, more than 60% of the respondents reported that they patronized one of the chain's stores on a weekly basis.

Regarding their use of Facebook in general, 86.2% of the respondents consulted their personal FB pages daily, while 6.9% did so several times a week, and the others less than once a week. When asked how long they had been members of the food retailer's FB community, 37.7% responded that they had been members for more than a year, 25.6% for 6–12 months, 21.9% for 1–5 months, and 14.8% for less than one month.

### 4. Results: motives for visiting the food retail chain's FB page

Respondents navigated the food retail chain's FB page primarily to learn about currently discounted items, consult suggested recipes, enter contests, learn about exclusive promotions for FB page visitors, find information about new products in-store, and get discount coupons (see [Fig. 1](#)).

In contrast, the results show that interacting with other customers, complaining and showing dissatisfaction, interacting with page moderator, and reading reviews from other customers were the least important motives for visiting the food retail chain's FB page.

In order to assess whether motives for visiting depended on the individual characteristics of members of the food retailer's FB page (i.e., gender, age, and FB page membership duration), we used ANOVA analyses to compare the different groups. The results are reported in [Table 1](#). The findings show that women were more likely than men to view the food retailer's FB page to get information on currently discounted items, view the suggested recipes, enter contests, get discount coupons, and read informative columns on food and diet. The results also show that respondents aged 18–34 were more interested in contests and exclusive promotions than older groups. Those aged 55 and over were more likely to consult the food retail chain's FB page to get

**Table 1**  
 Motives for visiting the food retail chain's FB page – Comparison by gender, age and membership duration.

Motives	Gender					Age					Membership duration			
	Total	Men	Women	F	Sig	18–34	35–54	> 54	F	Sig	> 1 year	< 1 year	F	Sig
Get information on currently discounted items	4,03	3,83	4,05	3,762	0,053*	3,99	3,99	4,24	3,645	0,026*	4,10	3,99	2565	0,109
View the suggested recipes	3,86	3,58	3,89	7,995	0,005*	3,78	3,86	4,08	4,563	0,011*	3,97	3,79	6,547	0,011*
Enter contests	3,84	3,39	3,90	17,798	0,000*	3,95	3,78	3,72	3,171	0,042*	3,77	3,89	2,133	0,144
Get exclusive discounts for members of the Facebook page	3,60	3,41	3,62	2,638	0,105	3,72	3,52	3,51	3,337	0,036*	3,75	3,51	8,985	0,003*
Get information on new products offered by the food retailer	3,53	3,48	3,53	0,210	0,646	3,46	3,50	3,76	4,085	0,017*	3,64	3,46	5,693	0,017*
Get discount coupons	3,51	3,13	3,55	8,057	0,005*	3,62	3,44	3,41	2,112	0,121	3,42	3,56	2,312	0,129
Read informative column on food and diet	3,42	3,13	3,45	7,326	0,007*	3,27	3,49	3,63	6,763	0,001*	3,58	3,32	11,328	0,001*
View videos of culinary tricks	3,15	3,15	3,16	0,001	0,972	2,96	3,24	3,42	10,290	0,000*	3,22	3,12	1,609	0,205
Read reviews from other customers	2,30	2,39	2,29	0,768	0,381	2,21	2,33	2,44	2,734	0,065	2,39	2,24	3,948	0,047*
Interact with the food retailer via the moderator	1,88	2,14	1,85	7,286	0,007*	1,82	1,93	1,93	1,374	0,253	1,97	1,83	4,534	0,033*
Complain and show dissatisfaction	1,75	2,06	1,72	10,240	0,001*	1,68	1,75	1,96	4,348	0,013*	1,74	1,76	0,097	0,755
Interact with other customers	1,72	1,94	1,69	5,919	0,015*	1,60	1,78	1,86	5,831	0,003*	1,78	1,68	2,680	0,102

information on currently discounted items, view the suggested recipes, get information on new products offered by the food retailer, read informative columns on nutrition and diet, and view videos of culinary tricks (Table 2).

As for the effect of FB membership duration on respondents' motives, results show that individuals who had been members of the food retail chain's FB community for over a year were more likely to be interested in viewing the suggested recipes, getting exclusive discounts, learning about new products in-store, and reading informative columns on nutrition and diet.

With regard to attitudes toward the Facebook page, the motives explain 19% of the variance. "Get information on currently discounted items" was the most favorable predictive factor, followed by "interact with the food retailer via the moderator" and "interact with the food retailer via the moderator." For FB page dynamism, "view videos of culinary tricks" and "interact with the food retailer via the moderator" were the most important favorable factors. For FB page enjoyment, the most important positive predictors were "view the suggested recipes" and "read informative column on food and diet."

The results show that three motives—"get information on currently discounted items", "read informative column on food and diet," and "view videos of culinary tricks"—have significant positive effects on all the dependent variables. On the other hand, visiting the food retail chain's FB page to complain and show dissatisfaction has significant negative effects on all the dependent variables.

4.1. Qualitative analysis of retailer FB pages

In order to further elucidate the results of the quantitative study, a qualitative analysis of the Facebook page content of four major food retailers was conducted over a period of two months. We chose these food retail chains because they have several thousand or even hundreds of thousands of fans, unlike other retailers that have pages dedicated to franchised stores but no corporate page or connection between the pages. In general, the published content confirms the results of the quantitative study on consumer motivation, although the pages showed some slight variations depending on the type of retailer.

Two of the four retailers we studied position themselves as low-cost chains, while the other two are more high-end (one of the two latter participated in our quantitative study by posting the link to the survey on its FB page). This positioning is further reflected in the type of posts on their pages. The two high-end retailers regularly post once or twice a day. When the retailers post twice in one day, the content of the posts is usually different in order to cater to fans' different motivations and diversify page content. Most often, one post is a seasonal recipe or cooking tip and the other is a coupon or information on a product in the

weekly flyer. The posts also provide information about the retailer's loyalty card or information of potential interest for all customers, such as news that organic products are now available in the online store. In this respect, the retailers seem to be in sync with the main motivations we found in our quantitative study. We also noted that posts addressing problems experienced by many customers, such as those related to loyalty cards, generate more comments (indicating consumer interest in loyalty cards) and are often the posts where the moderator intervenes the most.

Of the two lower-cost retail chains, one posts on its page about once a week and the other about two or three times a week. The posts are mainly a response to consumers' primary motive based on our quantitative study, i.e., to obtain information about discounted products. The pages also provide information on available products and share information related to consumer health, such as product recalls or issues that could potentially affect the entire industry. As a result, these pages contain more utilitarian content and fewer posts about recipes and contests, something that a fan of one of the pages criticized. The retailer replied that it had taken note of the fan's criticism and passed it on to the media content manager. It is interesting to note here that consumers were able to request the type of content they expect from retailers. Similarly, a fan of one of the high-end retailers suggested that the latter should post its recipes on another social network, like its main competitor does. This clearly shows the extent of interactions consumers have with retailer FB pages.

In general, reactions to all types of content posted are consistent with the ranking obtained in the quantitative study. The posts that garner the most likes, comments, and shares are the ones containing information on discounted products, followed closely by those with recipes. Visuals and formats also seem to play a key role in determining the extent to which consumers will react to a post. Recipes with cookbook-quality photos and short videos are often quite popular. Videos often generate more reactions than still images. Content created with influencers or known endorsers, particularly video content, is often very popular and may be shared over 100 times. Even if viewing these videos is not one of the key motivations bringing consumers to the page, they generate responses and contribute to the retailer's visibility through sharing and tags. Some retailers clearly understand the benefit of teaming up with known cooks and key influencers. In other cases where the goal is to encourage consumer participation, posts asking people to react by voting are the most successful, often getting several hundred reactions. Posts that ask for more involved participation ("What is your favourite end-of-year recipe?") often get fewer than ten reactions.

Despite the interest shown by consumers, contests are not among the most frequent posts. Contests are usually held on the retailer's



**Table 2**  
Regression analysis results.

	Image of the Food retail chain		Attitudes toward the Food retail chain FB page		Dynamism value of the Food retail chain FB page		Information value Food retail chain FB page		Enjoyment value of the Food retail chain FB page	
	Beta	Sig	Beta	Sig	Beta	Sig	Beta	Sig	Beta	Sig
0										
Get information on currently discounted items	0.135	0.000*	0.135	0.000*	0.110	0.001*	0.160	0.000*	0.094	0.004*
View the suggested recipes	0.160	0.000*	0.112	0.001*	0.100	0.005*	0.066	0.066	0.203	0.000*
Enter contests	0.072	0.0203*	0.035	0.274	0.060	0.066	0.062	0.061	0.094	0.003*
Get exclusive discounts for members of the Facebook page	0.023	0.518	0.023	0.518	- 0.007	0.850	-	0.0012	0.000	0.996
Get information on new products offered by the food retailer	0.027	0.413	0.027	0.413	0.047	0.162	0.109	0.001*	0.001	0.982
Get discount coupons	0.010	0.757	0.030	0.375	0.019	0.585	0.020	0.559	0.011	0.749
Read informative column on food and diet	0.102	0.006*	0.110	0.004*	0.115	0.003*	0.119	0.002*	0.146	0.000*
View videos of culinary tricks	0.137	0.000*	0.100	0.008*	0.119	0.002*	0.085	0.028*	0.110	0.002*
Read reviews from other customers	0.059	0.089	0.049	0.170	0.055	0.128	0.019	0.607	0.064	0.065
Interact with the food retailer via the moderator	- 0.014	0.734	0.129	0.001*	0.119	0.004*	0.113	0.006*	0.002	0.952
Complain and show dissatisfaction	- 0.113	0.000*	- 0.122	0.000*	- 0.132	0.000*	- 0.159	0.000*	- 0.105	0.001*
Interact with other customers	0.037	0.363	- 0.043	0.308	- 0.026	0.538	- 0.006	0.681	0.010	0.808

**Notes:** R Square: 0.22 (FRC image), 0.19 (FRC Facebook page attitude), 0.160 (FRC Facebook page dynamism), 0.212 (FRC Facebook page information), 0.150 (FRC Facebook page enjoyment).

website or directly in store, which tends to limit reactions to the related posts. But although they generate fewer reactions directly on the page, such posts do help make consumers aware of contests being held.

In addition to the format of posts, visibility is another key factor that explains what reactions are generated. Most of the posts published by the two high-end retailers are not sponsored and their reactions are therefore limited, although some posts generate over a hundred reactions. The other retailer's posts generate a comparatively greater number of reactions, given they have ten times fewer fans than the first two retailers. Most of their posts are sponsored, which means that they appear in the news feed of numerous consumers who are not fans of the retailer's page (according to segmentation criteria determined by the retailer). This completely changes their visibility compared to the two high-end retail chains. However, while their publications are certainly more visible, they have fewer fans and their community is generally less active than the other retailers' communities.

In terms of visibility, we noted that posts are often scheduled to correspond with the times when people generally start and end work on weekdays as well as occasional posts during lunch hours. Most posts seem to be automated to appear on the hour. Recipes are usually posted at meal times, whereas coupons and promotional offers are more frequently posted on Fridays and Saturdays because a significant portion of consumers shops during these days.

For fans motivated by one of the last four motives in our ranking (i.e., interact with other customers, complain and show dissatisfaction, interact with the food retailer via the moderator, and read reviews from other customers), accessing and engaging with the appropriate sections of the page is more difficult. Content related to these motives does not appear on the main page, which is entirely controlled by the retailer and only displays retailer content. In order to express themselves or read other opinions, consumers often have to go to the page's community tab where the vast majority of messages only attract the attention of moderators, who deal with problems and complaints privately. It is even harder to access this section on the mobile application. The fact that this information is harder to access and consumers aren't always aware it exists can be linked to the results regarding the community aspects of the page. We still found, however, that some fans engage on the main page and enhance page content, notably by giving advice on recipes.

The retailers we studied mostly use their pages to deliver content to their audience (social publishing), while maintaining control over exchanges and conversations (social community) (Tuten and Solomon, 2017). We also noted that moderators play a relatively limited role on the pages of the four retail chains. As a result, most of their interactions are brief and if fans raise issues, moderators often direct them to other means of communication (e.g., phone, private messaging). Moderators often act as intermediaries who redirect consumers to other resources or relay information. Consumers also receive replies very quickly, usually within the hour. Contact with moderators remains an important motivation for consumers who visit the page, so it is important that they feel moderators are present and effective.

Finally, women outnumber men on the food retailers' pages we studied and are more active, which is consistent with the data we obtained on demographic characteristics for our sample.

**5. Conclusion and discussion**

A study of Fortune 500 companies shows that companies with blogs and social media accounts perform better (in terms of revenues, profits, and reputation) than those without (Wei et al., 2014). However, implementing a Facebook strategy alone does not ensure marketing success (Hsu, 2012). Many companies are still struggling to determine the best way to integrate social networks into their branding strategy (Ng, 2014). Improper use of Facebook can generate negative eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth), which may have negative impacts on attitudes toward a company's FB page and corporate image.

SNSs provide opportunities for users, individuals and businesses to interact, share, and create content. These online activities have significant consequences for businesses and their brands (Muntinga et al., 2011), including retailers that integrate SNSs into their marketing strategies (Anderson et al., 2014). Facebook is the prevailing social media platform used in the food service sector, particularly the restaurant industry (Kang et al., 2014). Social media represents a substantial change in communications and interactions between retailers and consumers. By understanding Facebook users' motivations, companies can attract new members and encourage repeat visits to their FB pages.

As retailers increasingly integrate social media into their marketing and communication strategies (Anderson et al., 2014; Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011), it is important to investigate consumer motivations, decision-making, preferences, and behavior in the context of SNSs (de Vries et al., 2017; Lim and Kumar, 2018; Ng, 2016). Of particular interest is research into consumer motivations for visiting retailers' Facebook pages (Anderson et al., 2014). Our study contributes to the literature on social networking sites by examining the main motives for consumer participation and engagement in social networks in the food retail industry. To date, and to the best of our knowledge, no study has examined the benefits of FB pages for both food retailers and their FB community members.

This study provides evidence that consumers consult the FB pages of food retail chains to learn about discounted items, read recommended recipes, participate in contests, learn about exclusive promotions for FB page members, learn about new products sold in-store, and get discounts. The monetary benefits (e.g., promotions, contests, coupons) and content benefits (e.g., recipes, information on new products) encourage customers to regularly visit retailers' FB pages. The results confirm the importance of tangible and functional benefits (information and monetary benefits) in fostering loyalty to these pages. Information novelty and unique monetary features geared toward members enhance their interest and positively affect their attitude toward the firm's FB page. In the food retail sector, the results show that consumers are increasingly using retailers' FB pages to seek information on promotions and recipes.

The qualitative study found that videos are often quite popular and generate more sharing compared to text and images. The use of influencers and known endorsers (e.g., a local professional chef) can exponentially increase the number of likes and shares, especially when using video. These findings support those of de Vries et al. (2017) and Chua and Banerjee (2015). For instance, de Vries et al. (2017) found that vivid posts generate more likes, shares and comments. Users react more strongly to posts that appeal to their emotions than to informational posts (de Vries et al., 2017). Food retailers put a lot of marketing effort into developing relationship with users and increasing engagement. Future research should examine the effects of social media activities on food retailer image and generic brand image.

The results of the empirical study provide evidence of the effect that individual characteristics can have on FB users' motives in the retail sector. Previous studies have reported differences in FB use between generational cohorts. For instance, younger adults are reported to use FB more frequently than older adults (Hayes et al., 2015). Our study findings enrich these observations by explaining the differences between older and younger users in terms of their motives for visiting food retailers' FB pages. Future empirical studies could explore this area further to provide deeper insights into these differences and their impact on retailers' social network use. The personality profile of users is another factor that may impact their visits to corporate FB pages. In Canada's multi-ethnic market, future research is encouraged to examine the effect of individual and cultural values on the way people use social media such as Facebook, their motivations for visiting corporate FB pages, their attitude toward these pages, and their purchase intentions (Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011).

Recent works provide evidence that SNSs influence brand attitudes,

brand trust, brand image, brand relationship quality, brand reputation, and purchase intentions (Beukeboom et al., 2015; Dijkmans et al., 2015; Gamboa and Gonçalves, 2014; Kang et al., 2014; Park and Kim, 2014; Yahia et al., 2018). This study extends these findings by reporting that motives for visiting a food retail chain's FB page significantly influence respondents' attitudes toward the page's dynamism value, informative value, and enjoyment value.

## 6. Limitations

This study focuses on one particular social network site (i.e., Facebook). Although food retailers mostly use Facebook, other social media such as Twitter should also be considered. Investigating different social media platforms would help in understanding the complementary aspects and the particularities of each platform. Further studies are encouraged to extend the scope of this study by proposing a conceptual model based on recent developments in the social network environment.

Whereas this study is descriptive, future research could use experimental designs to examine the effect of different Facebook tools (i.e., text post, photo and video) on user endorsements and engagement. The study also limits its survey of motivations to the members of the FB page of a food retail chain. Surveying non-members would provide additional insights.

Scholars are also encouraged to include a broader spectrum of retailers from other industries (e.g., fashion and apparel, home appliances and electronics, etc.). It would be interesting to compare the motives for visiting the FB pages of retailers in different industries.

## 7. Managerial implications

The social media environment has seen remarkable growth in the last decade. SNSs provide enormous opportunities to businesses in sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and food retail. SNSs represent a different kind of communication environment that should be studied in order to develop effective marketing communication and relationship programs. Understanding consumer profiles and their motives for visiting a food retailer's Facebook pages is imperative to stimulate traffic, develop relationships, and enhance the retailer's image and brand attitude.

This study provides managers of food retail chains with insights into consumer motives for visiting their Facebook pages and the role those pages play in strengthening their brands and enhancing consumer attitudes. Finding information on upcoming sales (i.e., monetary benefit) is the prime motive for consumers visiting food retail chain FB pages. Retailers can drive traffic to their FB pages by frequently posting information on upcoming sales and exclusive promotions. Recommending recipes is another effective way to enhance members' experiential benefits and increase interest in the FB page. According to this study's findings, to increase the retention of its members, a food retailer should provide exclusive promotions and informative, value-added content such as new product descriptions, recipes, and information features.

It is important for retailers to regularly update their FB pages (dynamism) and keep them entertaining (rich and varied content) in order to optimize page contributions to corporate image building. Furthermore, information posted on the page must be appropriate, of good quality, well presented and easy to find. Enhancing the page's informative and entertainment value can help boost members and consumers' commitment and affective attachment to the retailer. It would be interesting for food retail chains to continuously track posts on their FB pages in order to identify those which are frequently endorsed (liked or commented on) by their FB members. With the spread of mobile devices, numerous social media applications have also gone mobile, and many retailer mobile applications have been created. Retailers should consider personalizing their mobile applications and FB page content based on the motives of FB page visitors. Finally,

findings from this study show differences in FB visit motivations based on age and gender. As a result, food retailers may wish to adapt their activities and posts depending on their target audience.

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