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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DIGITAL MARKETING AND MANAGERS UPGRADING SKILLS TO FIT IN THE NEW ERA

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ABSTRACT

It is an undeniable fact that the global economic crisis and recession have caused rapid, structural changes in the hierarchical pyramid of enterprises and solutions are being sought to recover the sales of each company's products. Moreover, it goes without saying that the historical time keeps speeding up. More specifically, the rapid development of technology highlights issues of techniques for the promotion of products and services. Consumers are no longer content with conventional promotions of products and services. Stereotypes of marketing techniques are enriched by technological means and many businesses are spearheading digital marketing. However, each company has its own digital footprint in the electronic environment as "[...] it is now inconceivable for a company, from the smallest to the largest brand, not to have a presence on the internet." (Panigyrikis, 2016, 179). Based on these changes, there are a lot of arising issues and challenges faced by businesses, marketing executives and consumers themselves. The paper discusses the theoretical background of digital marketing and the challenges arisen and faced by managers.

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INTRODUCTION

Marketing is about the process of market research and meeting customer needs. Managers in order to increase the sales of their products and then the profitability of their businesses carry out appropriate promotional and advertising methods. The term 'Marketing Mix' was proposed by Neil Borden (1964) and then McCarthy, in 1964 limited the variables of the mixture to 4 (Constantinides, 2006). In fact, the 4P was formulated, i.e. the elements of the Product, Price, Place and that of Promotion. Essentially, it is a conceptual framework where managers plan their moves and put them into full action (Londhe, 2014). However, over the years, more and more, additions to the Mix itself in the field of marketing and planning strategies to be fully aligned with the current context (Londhe, 2014). The study of international literature and articles prove that there is a tendency to recast the dice and enrich the 'traditional' marketing mix. One of the main arguments for criticism is that the mix as an approach defines marketing from the point of view of the business and not from the point of view of the consumer.

Two trends are identified among scientists. In particular, the group supporting the traditional marketing mix is recorded by adopting new elements and the group of scientists proposing completely different approaches to the subject. However, reflecting upon the already set circumstances, it is a given that the marketing mix must diversify and incorporate new variables in order to survive in the globalised micro-economic and macro-economic environment. Product, price, distribution, and promotion variables should be enriched with new elements. It is therefore clear that e-commerce and digital marketing are emerging as the predominant norms.

Theoretical Background

Digital marketing and tools: First, it is easily realized that the rules of the game have changed and difficulties and/or even feelings such as anxiety on behalf of business managers to reach their customers have now been arisen. Approaching their customers, in addition to conventional and printed means of approach, takes place mainly via the internet. The dependence of advertising departments and management on advertising and print media is considered obsolete (Scott, 2013).

Therefore, digital promotions, in short, digital marketing plays the leading role. Indeed, numbers and measurable data never lie; the money spent on digital marketing in 2016 was more than the money spent on TV ads (BI Intelligence, 2016, as in Smith, 2017). The conceptualization of digital marketing can be given by Chaffey, et al. (2006, 10) who define it as “*the management and execution of marketing using electronic media such as the web, e-mail, interactive TV and wireless media in conjunction with digital data about customers’ characteristics and behaviour.*” A key difference between the concepts of digital marketing and conventional marketing is identified. The critical issue lies in the interaction between customers and the product. More specifically, conventional means of promoting products essentially present the product to their potential customers in a passive way. On the contrary, in digital marketing, the customer himself is defined as the driving force, the trigger to search for information and products. “*Digital marketing is user-centered, more measurable, ubiquitous, interactive.*” (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016, 39). The main advantages of digital promotions of products and services include “[...] *branding, functionality, interactivity, visual communication, related advertising, community connections, virality [...]*” (as cit. above, 2016, 39). Digital marketing has promotional channels and strategies to achieve the initial goals. In other words, the distribution channels constitute a mechanism that enables businesses to reach their clients and promote their products simultaneously (Key, 2017). Therefore, potential customers are informed in a quite effortless and costly way. The most widely used promotional channels are e-mail, social media, and search engine marketing (SEM).

Search-engine marketing: Search engine marketing includes search engine optimization (SEO) and cost-per-click (PPC) (Key, 2017). Google has so far emerged as the dominant search engine (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016). Search engines are the means of searching for information, products, and services. Proper consumers search will produce correct results and meet their needs in terms of finding the right tangible and intangible goods. The keywords used as well as the unique characteristics of the goods offered will significantly and effectively limit the search. Otherwise, the competitive advantage of enterprises to dominate over the others disappears (West, 2016). Search engines have an advantage over conventional promotions as they are the strongest means of return on investment. The prevalence of a website and the goods offered to potential consumers depends, for the most part, on optimisation. The optimization of the website and its consequently improved ranking inevitably increase the site traffic, and/or sales of goods. (Xiaojie, Yuan & Jian, 2016). Search engine marketing is the umbrella term, including optimization and online presence. Searching electronically for goods results in thousands or even millions of webpages. To illustrate this point, we should use the example of the large H&M mass clothing chain. At the top of the google engine webpage, paid entries are displayed, and then organic entries are displayed. Paid Per Click entries stipulate that if consumers click on the advertised listings, businesses must pay the corresponding price in the search engine. Organic results relate to clicks on unpaid and essentially free listings (Kelsey, 2017).

E-mail marketing: E-mail marketing is proven to be of strategic importance, in turn. It has emerged as a key digital promotion tool.

The most common e-mail consumers receive regularly is Newsletters. A few benefits are identified when applying e-mail marketing. Communication via e-mails is massive and targeted. Communication costs are also limited, if not zeroed. The company's website traffic, sales and revenues are growing dynamically, and the consumer is totally accessible (Hudák et al., 2017; Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016). The disadvantages of e-mail marketing are the tendency of consumers to stop being subscribers to the business database or e-mails to be filed as spams. In these cases, no matter how the content of the e-mails is optimized is and/or used the appropriate, personalized banners, it will not engage the consumer since he has already set restrictive conditions for their display (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016). Consumers of today compared to consumers of the past treat differently the advertisements and newsletters they receive through e-mails. This transpires as e-mails are more personal, the consumer has consented to their acceptance and has the available space and time to process them whenever he wishes (Chittenden & Rettie, 2002).

Social media: The third promotional channel is social media. Most people intend or already have an account on popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Youtube etc. (Alalwan et al. 2017). The advent and integration of social media into our daily lives sets the foundation for businesses to take steps to promote their goods through this means. Digital social groups of people who are created share content, opinions, create content and advertise goods by themselves. “*The question is no longer if people are signing in; the question is what they are signing in to and why they use certain applications to do so.*” (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014, 704).

Marketing through social networks can be defined as “*a dialogue often triggered by consumers/audiences, or a business/product/services [...] to set in motion a revealing communication on some promotional information [...] benefitting all of the involved parties.*” (Dwivedi et al., 2015, 291, ct. in Alalwan et al., 2017, 1179).

The evidence of some studies on the power of social media on consumers is irrefutable. Three quarters of consumers, following their online, interactive communication with the company, tend to alter their opinion about it. Also, if the customer chooses the 'like' reaction regarding the advertised good, there is more than 50% chance of buying it etc. (Funk, 2013). In the literature review carried out by Alawan et al., in 2017, they identified specific advantages and benefits that citation quote. Social platforms promote the 'targeting' of customers, replace traditional 'word of mouth' information and expand it extensively, develop pure relationships with their customers where customers are informed, involved, give feedback. and why not counter-recommend. Social network marketing highlights another issue of the utmost importance, namely how people connect to their accounts. As ComScore Media Metrix reports, in 2012 40% of users logged on to social platforms from their mobile (Funk, 2013, 60). However, the issue of Mobile marketing arises. Millennials and especially post-millennials (generation G) are considered digitally indigenous. As a result, “*This generation not only uses their smartphones to connect with the world, but also do their shopping.*” (Marketing Charts, 2017, in Smith, 2017, 1). It is speculated that spending on digital mobile marketing will be up to 72% (Chaffey, 2016; Smith, 2017, 4).

Borrowing Funk's information (2013, 60), a new generation of digital network marketing emerges and the coinage of the words 'mobile' and 'social' was proposed and the word 'mocial' is now recorded as slang among marketing scientists. The Millennials generation likes to get coupons, gets annoyed when pop-up entries appear, is attracted to nice images and graphics, seeks 'interpersonal', digital communication, appreciates interaction by writing reviews regarding goods and, finally, shows a preference for good prices and shipping offerings (Smith, 2011). Smith (2017) also recorded in her research the preferences of post-millennials regarding ads and promotions on social media. It is shown that digital natives also prefer offers, realistic, entertaining content, do not particularly appreciate personalized content. Post-millennials strongly underlined the possibility of rejecting advertising content as functionality and time saving are parameters of paramount importance. A finding of the research worth-mentioning is that the time devoted on behalf of post-millennials to a promotional content amounts to eight seconds the most (Smith, 2017, 8).

On social media, the same discrimination prevails in advertising content posted on search engines, i.e. organic and paid listings, is observed. Similarly, users are divided into organic users and paid users. Organic users are those who share digital, promotional material, but sharing is not subject to any financial transaction and reward. Businesses desire to expand their organic user population as the more of the followers are involved with a Facebook post (clicking, liking, commenting, sharing), the more the percentage of organic users expands. It appears that user engagement is proving decisive based on digital content. Finally, marketing managers should adapt to new, rapidly evolving technological data and consider that *"The social media networks are constantly tweaking their algorithms—each tweak could potentially sink content that was previously rising to the top of the News Feed."* (Peruta & Shields, 2018, 14).

Challenges: The main variables and techniques of digital marketing have been clarified above. The characteristics of two generations have also been mentioned, which, although they do not have a huge age gap between them, have a looming digital divide. All these variables and components of digital marketing also create new challenges that will either businesses be able to mitigate them or, unfortunately, will drift into 'business oblivion'. First, it appears that marketing managers face huge challenges as digital marketing through social media proves to be a glorious field of action but at the same time demanding. The consumer is the leading force of the business, and his needs prevail. Marketing executives and businesses, in order to succeed, must collect the majority of preferences and involve as many different generations of users as they can. Indeed, the recent Eigenraam et al. (2018) survey found five types of digital consumer engagement. In other words, the authors recorded a classification of digital consumers and the reasons why they are digitally involved. Their engagement practices are categorised into five species, or *"[...] practices (1) for fun, (2) for learning, (3) for giving feedback to a brand, and practices where customers (4) talk about a brand, or (5) work for a brand."* (Eigenraam et al., 2018, 113). Businesses need to be vigilant about consumer preferences. In addition, executives should consider that they no longer manage the tangible product but the social platform where they should engage and motivate users. Another issue that needs to be addressed is technology-based companies such as Airbnb and Uber, which are up against conventional

businesses. Technology-based businesses are expanding their customer base and consumers are choosing from a wide range of goods. However, the challenge for more conventional businesses is that they will have to adopt a mix of marketing practices to stand up and take part in the business arena. Interaction between consumers/users creates sharing of information and reviews. In the event of defamation, managers should ensure that consumers' intention towards their products changes (Hofacker & Belanche, 2016). As a result of the above is the identified talent gap in terms of aptitudes, skills and, in general, the human capital that the digital marketing executive must hold in particular to develop a metric system of the impact of the company's digital marketing (Leefang et al., 2014). Managers are claimed to lack technical skills, i.e. limited knowledge of digital marketing techniques as well as knowledge about social media fora. Also, the inability to define a strategic planning and metric system (Royle & Lang, 2013). Regarding the metric system through which the digital impact of enterprises is validated, it has been proposed to create *"[...] a universal metric that allows for direct comparison of financial outcomes between traditional and online media."* (Leefang et al., 2014, 8).

The author is fully aligned with Cliff Wymbs (2011) who underlines the fact that the time has come for a brand, new specialization in academia. However, *"[...] a radical redesign of the marketing curriculum consistent with the emerging student and business needs of the 21st century is required."* (Wymbs, 2011, 93). The last emerging issue is the question of ethics among people working in the digital marketing industry. Ethical norms and regulatory rules are an inviolable area so that there is no breach of trust between companies and, moreover, experts in the field do not fall into the trap to optimise the image of business (Iredale & Heinze, 2016).

Conclusion

It is common sense that, the implementation of digital marketing is characterised by benefits and resulting challenges. In order for companies not to lose their competitive advantage, they will have to change their organisational structure and recruit managers more capable and knowledgeable regarding digital technology and marketing. This will be achieved on the basis of the creation of a new academic field, incorporating traditional and digital marketing principles. It is vital every stakeholder (academia, businesses, potential managers) understand that if proper changes do not take place, they will be considered obsolete within the ever-demanding business environment.

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