The Effects of Digital Marketing on Customer Relationships

Les effets du marketing numérique sur les relations avec les clients

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Abstract:

Digital marketing has fostered the growth of trusting relationships between consumer and brand, making it an increasingly important medium to utilize in order to maximize brand loyalty. With the possibilities to reduce costs, reach larger and new audiences, personalize, interact, and serve customers better marketers are learning how to utilize digital channels, like the Internet, email, mobile phones and digital television. The possibility to use digital channels for building customer relationships and long-term loyalty has recently gained rising attention. In this article we have focused and described a theory for understanding how digital marketing affects customer relationships to a brand. Besides, this study shows that how customers gained power in their relationships with brands. It also shows the factors that are working behind to make the customers loyal to the brand and have a positive attitude toward to brand. It also discusses about the differences of traditional marketing and digital marketing and the changes brought by digital marketing in brands relationship marketing. Lastly, it shows what customers really want brands to do on digital media and their valuable feedback to the brands.

Keywords: digital marketing, customer relationships, loyalty, brand, e-marketing.

Jel Classification Codes: M31, J51.

Résumé:

Le marketing numérique a favorisé la croissance des relations de confiance entre le consommateuret la marque, ce qui en fait un moyen de plus en plus important à utiliser pour maximiser la fidélité à la marque. Avec les possibilités de réduire les coûts, d'atteindre un public plus large et nouveau, de personnaliser, d'interagir et de servir les clients, les meilleurs spécialistes du marketing apprennent à utiliser les canaux numériques, comme Internet, le courrier électronique, les téléphones mobiles et la télévision numérique. La possibilité d'utiliser les canaux numériques pour établir des relations avec les clients et fidéliser à long terme a récemment attiré de plus en plus l'attention. Dans cet article, nous avons concentré et décrit une théorie pour comprendre comment le marketing numérique affecte les relations clients avec une marque. En outre, cette étude montre comment les clients ont gagné en puissance dans leurs relations avec les marques. Il montre également les facteurs qui travaillent pour rendre les clients fidèles à la marque et avoir une attitude positive envers la marque. Il aborde également les différences entre le marketing traditionnel et le marketing numérique et les changements apportés par le marketing numérique dans le marketing relationnel des marques. Enfin, il montre ce que les clients veulent vraiment que les marques fassent sur les médias numériques et leurs précieux commentaires aux marques.

Mots clés: : marketing digital, relation client, fidélisation, marque, e-marketing.

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1. Introduction:

1.1. Problem Statement

This article focuses on: How digital marketing affects customer relationship to a brand? And examines how marketers can use digital channels to develop and strengthen customer relationships.

1.2. Report Objectives:

- To notice the changes brought by digital media in brands relationship marketing .

- To see how relationship marketing changed over the years and what differs from traditional approaches marketers had.

- To see how digital media changed the way brands act toward customers and how customers gained power in their relationships with brands.

- To find out whether customers are being loyal toward the brands or not

- To understand what digital media are as well as digital marketing?

- To compare traditional marketing and digital marketing to understand the impacts of digital marketing on customer engagement**.**

1.3. Digital Marketing and Customer Relationship

The understanding of how to use digital channels like the Internet, email, mobile phones and digital television in marketing has increased, and marketers now use these channels for different purposes. For example, some use them for acquiring new customers, while some focus on serving customers better. Digital marketing communication has typically been information about products, advertising on the web, and direct marketing via email and mobile. It seems like the channels and concepts of digital marketing have been used separately and operationally, while the strategic understanding and models of how and why to use different digital channels are still developing. At the same time, marketers have acknowledged the importance of cultivating customer relationships. Consequently, there is now increasing discussion about how to use digital marketing to develop customer relationships, an approach that has not been fully utilized yet.

Reasons why marketers may not have fully exploited the opportunities of digital channels include ways of thinking and understanding, and possibly lack of experiences and models how to use digital marketing from a customer relationship perspective. It seems like in many cases attracting new customers and reducing marketing costs have become the main goals in marketing via digital channels. It could also be that companies have relied overly on technology. That is, high hopes of new technological innovations and the possibilities provided by them may have led too much focus on channels, not on customers and retention. Marketers have experimented with the new channels, but do they have clear strategies and visions what they want topursue

with digital marketing?

With a growing number of e-marketing books, there seems to be a focus on short-term operational issues, like carrying out online marketing campaigns. Instead, among many others, Godin (1999), Novak and others (2000), Brondmo (2000), and Zeithaml (2002) have given emphasis to the customer relationship and service perspectives of digital marketing. It is believed that digital channels can be used to create unique and positive experiences to customers, and build trust and relationships in the long term by mixing all aspects of products, service, brand, and communication — not just transactions (Wind, Yoram&Mahajan, Vijay, 2002, p. 247). For example, Kwak and others (2002) found that product information requests over the web are positively related to online purchases. However, there is still little information and empirical research on how digital marketing channels can be used to boost customer relationships.

To look the use of digital channels in marketing from a customer relationship perspective offers several benefits to a marketer. Brand communication can be frequent and personalized, and different options for a dialogue exist. The benefits of dialogue include learning from and about customers, revealing their needs and interests, and being able to provide them with better and more personal service. From a customer perspective, the Internet has given power to get up-to-date information, ability to more easily compare products and services, and to get in touch with marketers (Coupey, Eloise, 2001, p. 44) . Furthermore, in digital environment customers increasingly use self-service and have more options to initiate action (e.g. give feedback, check account balances, request and personalize marketing communication). From the customer perspective, perceived value of using digital channels and interacting with a marketer can come several ways. It could be money, time, information, convenience, pleasure, entertainment, assistance, social interactivity, prestige, or something else the customer appreciates.

2. Definitions

Digital marketing:is a term used to describe the integrated marketing services used to attract, engage and convert customers online. Digital marketing utilizes multiple channels such as content marketing, influencer marketing, SEO, social media and online advertising to help brands connect with customers and uncover performance of marketing programs in real-time, Both marketer and customer can initiate interaction. Digital marketing as a term is more extensive than e-marketing because it encompasses marketing via digital channels independent of the medium, be it Internet, mobile, or any other .

The concept of Digital Marketing is very broad. It brings together all forms of marketing, operating through electronic devices (i.e. online, on mobile and on-screen). Have a glance at some of the most commondigital marketing types used these days:

Figure 1: the most digital marketing type

- Email Marketing: Being one of the earliest forms of digital marketing,it includes delivering personalized or targeted messages at the correct time .

- SEO (Search Engine Optimization): Well, it is the most general type of Digital marketing which is used to increase the website's visibility across the search engines. There are various techniques involved in this process ranging from on-site technical analysis and improvement, to blogging, link-building and content creation .

- Branding: is all of the ways you establish an image of your company in your customers' eyes. By building a website that describes what you offer, designing ads that promote your goods and services, selecting specific corporate colors that will be associated with your company, creating a logo, and featuring it across all your social media accounts, you are branding your company .

- PPC (Pay per Click): It is better known as Paid Search. In this process paid adverts are typically placed to the right or above of the 'organic' search results. The cost will depend on the competitiveness of the keyword you're bidding on .

- Social Media: It is all about managing a brand's image across multiple social channels including Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Linkedin and many others. This type has become greatly popular, mature and complex over the last few years.

- Online Advertising: Don't confuse it with PPC! This involves the process of advertising on others website. For example, you can buy a banner space on popular website, paying the website owner for the same.

- Text Messaging: Besides, the aforementioned online marketing components, it is the widely used Digital marketing type. Especially, with the exponential rise in usage of smartphones around the world has enhanced the dependency on them for quick and timely information .

- Digital service (e-service) is service via digital channels. Examples of digital services include e-tailing, online banking, discussion boards, order tracking, mobile weather services, personalized web pages, etc.

- Customer relationshiprefers to a relationship between customers and companies, service providers, and brands. From a customer perspective, the existence of a relationship refers greatly to an attitude:

perception of mutual way of thinking, i.e. two-way commitment (Grönroos, Christian, 2000). From a company point of view, relationship is usually considered existing when a customer has made the first or repeat purchase, although the line between prospects and customers is in many cases thin. In this paper, the main interest is in existing business-to-consumer relationships, especially in consumer-brand relationships.

- Brand loyaltyis the biased (i.e. non random) behavior al response (i.e. purchase) expressed over time by some decision-making unit, with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes (Jacoby & Chestnut 1978, 80). That is, for brand loyalty to exist, a pattern of repeat purchase must be accompanied by a positive attitude towards the brand. We think that purchasing behavior is the ultimate sign of brand loyalty, but also interest, knowledge, emotions, and activity expressed by customers can reflect brand loyalty (e.g. perceived fun, recommendation of products or services, feedback, spent time on a web site).

- Customer loyaltyis considered very similar to brand loyalty, differing only in the object of loyalty. That is, a customer may be loyal to a certain store or provider of products or services, but not necessarily to a particular brand. For example, a customer may always shop at Sears but does not care about the brand of the DVD player to be purchased (customer loyalty); yet another customer may have a favorite DVD player brand that could be purchased from any store (brand loyalty).

- Interactivityis the ability to address an individual or a group and the ability to gather and remember their responses, and to address the individual or a group once more in a way that takes into account their unique responses (Deighton 2000, adapted). We suggest that interactivity also includes customer feedback, inquiries, participation in product/service development, etc, because both marketer and customer can initiate interaction and typical communication processes (i.e. marketing message response) are not always followed.

3. BOOSTING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS WITH DIGITAL MARKETING

3.1. Central Elements of Digital Marketing

Interactive marketing, one-to-one marketing and customer relationship management (CRM), as well as brand management and service management emphasize the importance of building and managing customer relationships, and offer each useful model to understand how customer relationships develop. The literature reveals certain concepts and trends that could be central elements in boosting customer relationships with digital marketing. First, brand communication is identified as an important way to create customer loyalty. Second, the Internet is considered a good tool for customer service. Third, personalization is expected to create value for customers. Fourth, interactivity is presented as one of the major advantages of the Internet and other

new marketing channels. We think that brand communication and service are the key elements when boosting customer relationships via digital marketing, and elements of personalization and interactivity can be mixed into them to reinforce the effects (see Figure 1). We suggest that digital marketing can affect positively on customers' knowledge about products and services, involvement, buying behaviour, attitudes, loyalty and activity**.**
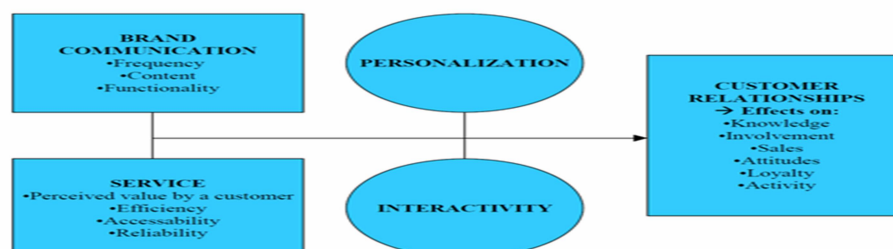
Figure 2: Central elements in boosting customer relationships with digital marketing

Three main factors in brand communication are expected to affect customer relationships: frequency (e.g. how many brand messages per week), content (e.g. promotional offers or information), and functionality (e.g. how easily customers find information on a web site). Brand communication can also be personalized. For example, segmentation or customer profiles can be used to create different messages for different customers, sent via their preferred channels. In addition, brand contacts can be interactive, which means that customers can search for information, make inquiries, give feedback and engage in various other activities with marketers or each other, by playing games on brand's website, chatting with other brand users, etc.

Digital service that is perceived valuable by customers is expected to affect customer relationships positively. This value could be money, time, information, convenience, pleasure, entertainment, assistance, etc. Efficiency and accessibility of the service are also important, which could mean easy access to a web site, ability to find desired service options and information associated with them with minimal effort. Reliability of the service is as well essential, for example the technical functioning and safety of an online bank. Digital service can also be personalized, for instance by offering different service options for different customers, and remembering their individual preferences of service situations. Various elements of interactivity, like online chat with service personnel, can be combined to digital service.

3.2. Brand Communication

Digital channels offer opportunities to keep up frequent brand communication with customers. Digital marketing can be used to create brand communication that customers perceive informative, entertaining and interesting, as well as it builds interactive brand contacts. Concepts of effective frequency and recency are central in brand advertising. Effective frequency implies that repeating messages to consumers will translate to awareness and learning, and eventually result in action. Recency theory emphasizes timing, suggesting that

advertising is most effective when it occurs close to the time when consumers are ready to buy (Broussard, Gerard, 2000) . Marketers seek optimal frequency: too little advertising and communication may be ineffective while too much is waste of money.

Brand literature shows how frequent communication has positive effects on customers' brand loyalty, and customer-brand relationships are deepened. First, consumers engage in brand relationships to simplify buying and consuming tasks, information processing, and maintain cognitive consistency and a state of psychological comfort and gratification. Later on, when the relationship develops, a consumer may begin to perceive a brand as a person, a trusted friend who is part of his or her everyday life (Fournier, Susan, 1998). Brand trust is influenced by the consumer's evaluation of any direct (e.g. trial, usage, satisfaction in consumption) and indirect contact (advertising, word of mouth, brand reputation) with the brand For instance, satisfaction is only one sign of brand loyalty. In line with that Delgado-Ballester and Manuera-Aléman (2001) argue that in many cases traditional satisfaction programmers alone are not enough for building brand relationships; especially in high involvement situations, brand trust has a stronger influence on customer commitment than overall satisfaction. The development of customer-brand relationships can be described as a process of communication. From a company point of view, digital channels offer cost efficient possibilities to a brand to keep frequently in touch with customers. Consumers exposed to email marketing recommended the brand to their friends more than those who had not received emails. Email also activated consumers to visit retail stores, buy products, and visit the brand's site on the Internet via links. Furthermore, brand attitudes were more positive among the consumers who had received email as opposed to those who had not. It was noted that consumers with higher brand loaylty appreciate regular communication from the brand more than less loyals. From this data we conclude that email offers marketers an opportunity to further strengthen brand loyalty among already loyal customers by keeping in frequent contact with them.

The results match with traditional advertising research suggesting that repetition of brand's advertising has stronger effects (responses, satisfaction) on those consumers who already use the brand and are familiar with it Brand communication via digital channels is also effective from the recency theory perspective, as interactivity allows customers actively receive or seek advertising and other information at the moment they want (usually when they consider buying something). That is, the timing of brand communication can be perfectly matched, which is more difficult to achieve through traditional media. Indeed, to compensate the timing problem, interactive elements that are accessed through digital channels are often attached to conventional media (e.g. direct response ads). For instance, mobile phones can be used with print media as a reply channel .

Their research shows that leading marketers are beginning to move beyond the basics of email marketing, from a campaign-focused approach to long-term and more sophisticated, personalized permission

email marketing programs, for example:

- Personalized content: e.g., customizable news, weather and sports reports

- Rules-Based notifications: e.g., city-specific airfare bargains, new book releases per favorite genres, birthday reminders, product replenishment alerts

- Account updates: e.g., custom stock portfolio updates, frequent flyer miles report, electronic utility bill, and monthly account activity/balance.

- Transaction statements: e.g., purchase receipt, shipping confirmation, complaint processing acknowledgement.

- Service convenience emails: e.g., proactive service tips and alerts, new value opportunities, product update information.

- Digital environment offers great tools for community building. In the Internet, it is quite easy for anyone to start building a virtual brand community by creating web pages. Indeed, many brand communities on the web are created or initiated by individual users and clubs, not by companies. (McAlexander, 2002, p. 97)

- On the other hand, company's ability to control the discussion of brand communities can be relatively limited or non-existing. The company may be able to facilitate the discussion to a certain extent, but it cannot actually control what consumers discuss (Muniz, Albert M, 2001, pp. 412-432).

3.3. Digital Services

The development of the Internet and other new channels has made it possible for firms to create new services and develop interactive and relationship-building contacts with their customers (Grönroos, Christian, 2000, p. 11).

To further emphasize the importance of online service, extensive survey data from more than 2000 e-tail sites shows that price-sensitive customers may be the least loyal, whereas customer service support is the main factor that attracts repeat buying . Indeed, the most experienced and successful companies using the Internet are beginning to realize that the key to success is not based only on presence or low prices, but instead on delivering electronic service quality (Zeithaml 2002).

3.4. Personalization

One of the advantages of digital channels is the ability to identify individual customers, and gather information from and about them. Personalization is expected to be an element that can work to boost customer relationships by creating more personal, interesting and relevant brand communication and better service. That is, in this paper we focus on how personalization mediates the effects of brand communication and service on customer relationships.

In the Internet, many forms of personalization can be made automatic by systems and software .

That is, similar to presented above, Parsaye(ref. Mohammed et.al. 2002, 635) has conceptualized

personalization of Web sites as follows: 1) customization – the system's ability to customize items by allowing individual users to set their own preferences, 2) individualization – the system's ability to customize itself to the user based on the user's exhibited behaviour, and 3) group characterization – the system's ability to customize itself to the user based on the preferences of the other users with similar interests.

3.5. Interactivity

- Digital environment offers opportunities to turn communication from one-way to interactive. Interactivity may consist of different elements, depending on the channel and media being used. For example, on web sites interactivity can be in the form of customer support tools (information, search processes, etc.) and two-way communication (contact forms, chat, etc.), as well as games and entertainment. Customers are engaged in a search or dialogue with firms and brands, where information and actions flow both ways. The firm is not always the party that starts the interaction or dialogue, instead in many cases customers act as initiators. It would be beneficial to explore if interactivity has effects on customer and brand loyalty. Research among the first in this topic suggested that interactivity has an impact on customer loyalty, at least for two reasons:

- Interactivity enables a search process that can quickly locate a desired product or service, thereby replacing dependence on detailed customer memory (Alba, 1997)

- Interactivity increases the amount of information that can be presented to a customer (Deighton 1996; Watson et.al. 1998).

- In the interactive environment like the Web, consumers may reach a state in which their sole attention is focused solely on the universe contained within the boundaries of their network navigation experience (Luna et.al. 2002). This can be commented like "I completely lost the track of time." Such a state has been labelled flow in previous research (Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, 2000). Developing games and online experiences is a new area for traditional brand marketers, which turns around the old concept of one-way brand communication. Previous means like sponsoring and offline events have not disappeared, but they are now more mixed with the online world. For example, some pop-artists have shown their live concerts on the Internet for free on the sponsor's web pages.

- We think that interactivity is likely to mediate the positive effects of brand communication on loyalty by increasing the number of brand contacts and spent time with the brand. Similarly, interactivity in service means that customer have better tools and options to control service situations, get help in problematic situations, and to modify their service profiles, etc., which is likely to bring them more value. We have now described how brand communication and service, mediated by personalization and interactivity can have positive effects on customer relationships. However, the flow of effects is not always direct; instead it may involve a process of interaction between marketers and customers.

3.6. Mediating Factors:

Although we emphasize that brand communication, service, personalization, and interactivity are

important in building customer relationships via digital channels, we recognize some other variables (i.e. mediating factors) that possibly affect all elements of digital marketing and must also be taken into account.
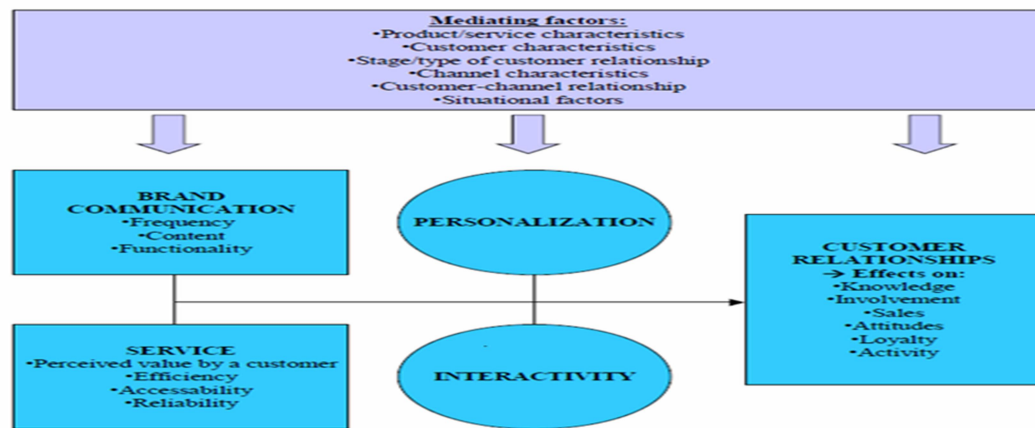

Figure 3 : Mediating factors digital marketing

Relationship building is considered to be most efficient and plausible with products and services that customers perceive as high-involvement, high-risk, heterogeneous, and where switching costs are high. However, to avoid oversimplification, it must be kept in mind that digital channels, like the Internet, can lower the risks and switching costs that customers confront, increase commoditization of products and services, and create multiple loyalties (Dussart, Christian, 2001). Besides; Customer relationships tend to be very heterogeneous: they differ in duration, strength, interactivity, and in many other aspects. Customer relationships also change dynamically over time, and are shaped by different stages and incidents. It is likely that the current stage and type of a customer relationship affects how to build relationships and loyalty via digital marketing.

Understanding customer relationships and interactivity calls for exploring the customer view, how do customers see their relationships with companies, products, services, and brands? Sometimes customers do not realize that they actually have any relationships. Instead, they often perceive only single incidents and encounters with products and services they engage in their daily lives.

4. Conclusion:

- In this paper we have described the effects of digital marketing on customer relationships. We suggest that brand communication and service are the key elements in this. Personalization and interactivity can be mixed into brand communication and service to reinforce the effects of digital marketing on customer relationships. Besides we tried to show the effects of digital marketing on customer relationships. We can conclude that brands are connected to their customers more than ever. In this digital age, to build a good relationship with customers need only one thing to do and that is digital marketing. Brands are trying to listen to their customers and providing best possible service to them. The amount of people in digital media is huge. Anything positive about the brand can lead them to success.

- Based on the above, we conclude the following points:

- To notice the changes brought by digital media in brands relationship marketing .

- For fulfilling this objective I asked proper question to the respondents. Changes are clear and customers do not have to wait in line to get their service. They can get it from the online.

- Brands organizes online contests and give reward to their customers, they feature their fans on their pages and take feedback from the customer and act upon it .

- Traditional marketers had to talk to face to face or activation to keep relationship with the customers but in digital media marketers can give support to their customer at any time and unlimited number of times .

- Customers are god to the brands. Negative word of mouth can spread quickly in these days with help of social networking sites. This can hamper in sales. Brands try to be humble with customers and listen to their problems and solve them .

- This study clearly showed that customers are being loyal to the brands because of their service quality .

- Customer engagement has been rising in digital marketing. Continuous contests, campaigns, regular posts on pages are making people to engage whereas traditional marketing has failed to engage customers .

- Digital marketing has enables so many things to the customers and brands. Through digital marketing brands are able to increase their sales volume and maintaining a good relationship with them. Consumers can compare brands easily and can figure out who is actually providing good services to them .

- We suggest that digital marketing can have positive effects on customer relationships, which can be seen both in short term (e.g. increased sales and response rates) and long term (enhanced loyalty, attitudes.

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