

Marketing Mix revisited in a Digital Era

Introduction

Often, today's world is characterised by digital connectivity and globalisation. This has assisted for boundaries of space, time or even political or geographic constraints to be removed, allowing communication style and cultures to merge (Winer, 2009). More importantly, it can be argued this new model of communication amongst subjects of society is impacting the dynamics in the relationship amongst companies and individuals – consumers are empowered and want to be involved in all steps of various marketing processes (Smith, 2011). A power shift has occurred, caused by the abundance of information the Internet provides and the saturation of alternatives, causing major socio-cultural and socio-political movements to influence buying (Labrecque et al., 2013).

Yet it is not to say businesses have lost their upper hand entirely – they must now operate and in a strategic, carefully-thought-out way through correctly evaluating the correct, most effective way to capture attention through promotional material, place it accordingly in a non-obtrusive way and influence behaviour subtly (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 1996). The following essay will discuss the changes digitalisation has brought to the marketing mix and the practice of marketing by illustrating key points with examples from the industry. It will further provide understanding how digital communication can be successfully established amongst subjects in the market today and how content can be managed effectively. Following a secondary research and analysis of literature and cases, it will be argued that marketing has been profoundly impacted by new era, and subsequently the lack of response has led to a skills gap in academia and industry.

Digital Era & Its Impact on the Marketing Mix

Companies' most important task in terms of marketing is affirming their social presence through showing influence, which according to Short et al.'s (1976) paper can be done through increasing intimacy and immediacy in the communication. A technique that companies utilise to achieve this is omni-channel marketing, through which the journey of the consumer is professionally guided by the marketer. It is informed and accurate across all touchpoints, showing the brand symbiotically (Kilian and McManus, 2015; Bhalla, 2014).

Another change companies are making is the personalisation of the marketing mix. Previously, marketing messages were aimed at a mass audience, unfiltered and linear, whereas today the approach is highly interactive and allows the consumer's personality to be considered (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). The following table illustrates how the digital era has impacted the communication mix through changes, experiences and tools used:

Integrated communication and instant receipt of consumer feedback is something digital marketing has been recognised for at an early stage, as traditional marketing, for the most part failed to achieve such results. Moreover, although a lot of models were proposed within the first few years of research in the field, Parsons, Zeisser and Waitman's (1998), illustrated as Figure 1 below, remained relevant until this day.

Firstly, creating a memorable and relatable brand is a key challenge. The good product is no longer a competitive advantage, as consumer demand has risen to include social, cultural and ecological conditions of the businesses prior to supporting them economically through their purchases (Pomering and Dolnicar, 2009). Secondly, engagement is key, especially on social media platforms. Companies are becoming increasingly aware of the requirement to provide a space for consumers to collaborate with each other and share insights and tips and incorporating this in their platforms. An example of this is ASOS, who developed a side section to their online shop, dedicated to beauty tips, styling advice and fashion journalism, as well as a marketplace for consumers to exchange goods and communicate amongst themselves, transforming the space into a pleasurable experience, regardless of whether a purchase has been made (McCormick and Levitt, 2012). The desired outcome is customer retention and increased brand loyalty, which further aligns with the agenda on the model above (Figure 1).

In terms of learning from consumers, technology substantially assists with this, as technology allows the recording of vast amounts of consumer behavioural data to be collected, retrieved and analysed at the command of the company, if appropriate tools are used. With development of intelligent software, companies are now able to understand natural language and gain insights from semiotic analysis of social media threads, allowing them to make predictions of future behaviour, based on historic data (Pang, and Lee, 2008; Fan and Gordon, 2014). An example company, specialising in AI (Artificial Intelligence) marketing is Echobox (2017), who use Narrow AI and prediction to optimise performance of content on social media platforms, promising to double referrals, resulting in an elimination of the need of an editor prior to publishing (Carley, 2017).

Finally, personalisation is achieved through targeted communication and advertisements, assisted through geo-tracking of location and analysis of online behaviour through usage and interest tracking. For example, Starbucks has equipped their mobile application with this technology, which enables push notifications for users, when there is a coffee shop nearby through tracking the location of the user through Twitter or Facebook (Schmitt, 2009). This is found to tackle the challenges of annoyance caused by mass audience communication and unfiltered sales propositions. and acknowledge the consumer desire for convenience through precise positioning (Constantinides, 2006).

Implications & Conclusion

An argument can be made that the rate of progression of technology, causing the change of consumer behaviour and in response of that the marketing industry attempting to keep up to date with those changes, are both exponentially and rapidly changing, whilst academia is moving at a comparatively slower rate, limited by the functional constraints of bureaucracy. The cross-disciplinary nature of marketing in the 21st century requires an aptitude in technological advances and how they are applied in the industry for better targeting, business intelligence and data analytics (Royle and Laing, 2014; Wymbs, 2011; Slater and Narver, 2000), but research illustrates education fails to match industry requirements.

To conclude, it has been illustrated that marketing has been fundamentally transformed through the presence of digital technologies in daily lives. The consumers have changed their desires, causing companies to re-evaluate their communication models, subsequently shifting the nature of strategic marketing planning. Highly technological solutions, such as intelligent software is now being used to enhance companies' understanding of the consumer, as well as for better targeting and personalisation of sales proposition. Simultaneously, an effort to provide engaging, educational content is made, aimed at increasing loyalty and retention amongst the audience, as well as a community that is expected to continuously attract new members through positive word of mouth and personal referrals.

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