Digital marketing communication strategy as means to enhance digital branding

Estrategia de comunicación marketing digital como medio para mejorar el branding digital

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Abstract
Companies worldwide have faced a quite discouraging reality ever since the SARS-CoV-2 pandemics started. In order for organizations to retrieve what they had accomplished hitherto and to build on their business once again, many of them have implemented digital strategies. This article analyzes the effect the digital marketing strategy on customer’s attitude toward brands providing e-services. 386 validated surveys were obtained analyzed through multiple linear regression. Results indicate that digital marketing has an impact on customer’s attitude toward brands.

Keywords: digital communication, e-branding, e-services

1. Introduction

To combat the COVID-19 pandemic, authorities and public health organizations around the world implemented social distancing and stay-at-home policies, this resulted in reduced opportunities to spend time together and new challenges to keep up with the daily activities (Nguyen, Gruber, Fuchs, Marler, Hunsaker & Hargittai, 2020). Physically, spaces had two realities before the pandemic, places in general constructed in connection toward
certain purposes (transportation, transit, commerce, recreation) and the interaction that people have with these spaces, and places that we borrow, such as roads or airports (Sampaio & Andrade, 2022).

In this setting, lockdown and social distancing rules resulting from the SARS CoV-2 pandemic have severely impacted "ordinary" enterprises and space use; yet, this has resulted in the speeding and development of multichannel retailing, as well as a greater integrating role for physical stores. (Nanda et al., 2021; Hoesli & Malle, 2021; LaSalle, 2020). According to Auge (2012), technology improvements are linked to communication and social interaction, and as a result, people's perceptions of place and time are becoming increasingly relativized. On this basis, social isolation aided the conversion of many procedures to e-processes, and studies revealed a favorable opinion of these e-processes, contrary to what consumers previously assumed (Pokrovskaiia, Leontyeva, Ababkova, Cappelli, & D’Ascenzo, 2021).

Consequently, future businessmen need to have or develop advanced communication skills within digital marketing, which encompasses social media marketing, digital marketing strategies, search engine optimization, content marketing, and e-mail marketing, according to the research. These skills would make customer involvement and open innovation easier (Papageorgiou, Mihai-Yiannaki, Ioannou, Varnava-Marouchou & Marneros, 2021).

Previously, Nisha and Sangeeta (2012) had stated that through commercial networks, electronic communications and information systems engineering future globalized and digitalized organizations will develop the forming, redirecting, and re-engineering of value formation relationships within or among enterprises, and also between enterprises and groups. This electronic communication consists of the electronic transmission of information and reflects and influences consumers’ attitude toward brands, that is, perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and shopping journeys (Grewal, Herhausen, Ludwig, & Ordenes, 2021). Therefore, organizations must keep in mind that communication, branding, and digital marketing activities have strong implications for buyers' attitudes and behaviors, as a consequence, understanding and creating a digital strategy that includes, among other things, these elements should be listed ad a priority (Conlin 2019).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Digital Marketing Communication

Because of digital evolution, digital platforms and their users have constantly increased in the last years. Platforms seek to provide almost everything customers need at the touch of a button, avoid the need to go out, search for options with filters, for example proximity, see the options and select their choice to request information or even make the final purchase (Kapoor, 2018). Digital marketing communication, or communication between firms and consumers via digital or electronic media, is quickly expanding, and it did so particularly during the COVID-19 era (Shankar, Grewal, Sunder, Fossen, Peters & Agarwal, 2021)

Taking advantage of the vast evolution, digital communication data would prove enormously beneficial for retailers, manufacturers, and service firms (De Luca et al., 2020, Dekimpe, 2020). Authors such as Grewal, Herhausen, Ludwig, & Ordenes (2021), state that for a number of reasons, digital communication generates extremely rich and useful data:

a) It provides discreet, first-hand information about consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

b) Second, shopper journeys are affected by digital communication.

c) Third, unlike traditional methods like surveys or focus groups, digital communication data can deliver insights at a higher degree of depth and scale.
On the other hand, because of the increasing diversity of media platforms, it is becoming more difficult for marketers to build a new and more comprehensive digital communication plan that will raise customer awareness (Stephen, Inbaraj, S. P. & T., 2021), arouses consumers’ desire for a brand (Kim & Ko, 2012), and cultivates an engaged brand community (Lim & Kumar, 2019).

2.2. Digital Branding
The building of relationships and alliances with clients, users, and partnering companies is referred to as branding (Granata & Scozzese, 2019). This relationship building process occurs through mechanisms that encourage dialogue and the involvement of stakeholders, allowing this to establish customer trust and loyalty (Granata and Scozzese, 2017). Therefore, branding is defined as a methodological discipline that deals with the process of brand construction, creation, and management, with the primary goal of communicating brand value to customers through the communication that businesses develop to explain and promote their brand and value proposition (Avalos, 2013).

Branding consists of creating value through different means, which leads to customer experiences that cause repeat purchase (Foroudi, 2019). Chaudhari and Holbrook (2001) had previously stated that customers' attitudes regarding a brand have a favorable impact on their ability to form a long-term relationship, Hegner, Fenko & Teravest (2017) complemented this with their results by demonstrating that attitudes have a significant effect on brand love for customers with both low and high involvement products.

Digitally, media managers are in charge of managing customer experiences and orienting dialogue towards consumers on digital platforms, whether they are controlled by a firm or not. In order to gauge the orientation toward conversation and the quality of contacts between enterprises and their customers, digital marketing communication and digital branding efforts can be used to derive attitudes, perceptions, and subjective values (Oncioiu, Căpușneanu, Topor, Tamaș, Solomon, & Dănescu, 2021). Finally, a strong positive attitude towards a brand will result into brand defense (Javed et al., 2015) brand love (Dalman, Buche & Min, 2019), long lasting relationships (Chaudhari and Holbrook, 2001), and repeated sales (Foroudi, 2019).

2.3. Numbers regarding internet use in México
Knowing the opportunity that digital media represents for firms is vital from the standpoint of the market, as Nava-Rogel et al. (2018) found in their study, which concluded that information technologies are crucial in enhancing company performance. According to INEGI (2019), there are 80.6 million Internet users in Mexico, accounting for 70.1 percent of the population aged six and up. There are 86.5 million users of mobile phones, and 20.1 million homes have Internet access. Similarly, the most popular devices for connecting to the internet are smartphones with 95% of internet users.

Organizations-wise, according to INEGI (2018) in 2017 there were 4,169,677 establishments considered MSMEs in Mexico, of which 39% had computer equipment for their daily activities. Likewise, 41.2% admitted having used the internet for their work activities in some way. This numbers translate into 1,625,606 companies that use computer equipment and 1,717,957 companies that use the Internet for their work activities, all of these being possible beneficiaries of the product of this research. These figures are presented in table 1.

This research focuses on examining how digital marketing communication influences consumers’ attitude toward branding. Authors such as Nanda et al., (2021); Hoesli & Malle (2021); LaSalle (2020) have analyzed the effect of SARS CoV-2 on organizations and how this effect translated into a development of multichannel retailing, as well as a greater integrating role for physical stores. In addition, Pokrovskaja et al (2021) found that social isolation
aided the conversion of many procedures to e-processes and revealed a favorable opinion of these e-processes, contrary to what consumers previously assumed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User type</th>
<th>Millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet Users</td>
<td>80.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone Users</td>
<td>86.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes with Internet access</td>
<td>20.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMEs with computers</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMEs using internet</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own development

The goal of this study centers on examining how digital marketing communication affects consumer’s attitude towards brands. Allowing companies to select the most appropriate digital communication strategy and, subsequently, leading customer experience toward a better brand attitude which may turn into repeated sales (Foroudi, 2019), brand defense (Javed et al., 2015), brand love (Dalman, Buche & Min, 2019), and long-lasting brand-customer relationships (Chaudhari and Holbrook, 2001). Thus, this study formulates the following hypotheses presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Digital Marketing Communication has an influence on Consumer’s attitudes towards brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Informative Digital Marketing Communication has an influence on Consumer’s attitudes towards brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Entertaining Digital Marketing Communication has an influence on Consumer’s attitudes towards brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Annoying Digital Marketing Communication has an influence on Consumer’s attitudes towards brands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own development

### 3. Sample and Method

This study is empirical, causal, cross-sectional, non-experimental, conducted under a quantitative approach, which included the application of a survey to people who had been in contact with businesses via digital platforms asking for information, products, services, and general questions regarding the business’ operations. The sample was calculated using data from INEGI (2021), which revealed that Aguascalientes, a city in central Mexico, had a population of 1.024 million, out of which 591,245 were economically active.

The study sample size was calculated using the formula for finite populations. A representative sample of 382 was obtained with a 95% confidence level. Using random sampling, 386 surveys were conducted and validated during the months of October and November 2021 among clients of organizations that use digital platforms. Table 3 summarizes the above-mentioned information.
This study's questionnaire was made up of 39 items contained in three sections. Section one had 13 items focused on customer's basic information. Section two, with 9 items, focused on consumer's attitude towards e-branding. Finally, section three referred to Digital Marketing Communication with 17 items divided into three dimensions: informative (6 items), entertaining (6 items), and annoying (5 items). A five-point Likert-type category-scaling format was used to measure all of the items in sections II and III (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree). Scale items were drawn from previously verified scales. Table 4 presents a summary of where the items were obtained.

Table 4
Questionnaire Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Customer’s data</td>
<td>Does not apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Attitude Toward Brand</td>
<td>Leischnig, Geigenmüller Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>E-marketing communication</td>
<td>Cheng et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own development

Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability Index (CFI), and the mean of the variance extracted (IVE) were used to assess the instrument's reliability and validity, with satisfactory results in all three indices (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Nunally & Bernstein, 1994). Table 5 presents the results of the reliability and convergent validity tests.

Table 5
Reliability and Convergent Validity Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>IVE</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards Brand</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td>0.781</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-marketing communication</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.919</td>
<td>0.408</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.925</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td>0.615</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoying</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own development

The analysis of the data yields Cronbach’s alpha values that meet the Nunnally (1987) and Hair et al (1998) criterion of being above 0.7. Similarly, the CFI values comply with being above 0.7, according to the criteria of Fornell and Lacker (1981), Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Finally, at this stage, the IVE values also comply with the provisions of Fornell and Lacker (1981), presenting values above 0.5. Therefore, it is concluded that the instrument has individual, composite, and convergent validity reliability.
4. Results

The calculations were made using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software, following the steps indicated by the multiple linear regression analysis technique (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2020; Rivera, 2020). The final number of surveys obtained is 386 respondents, being able to highlight the participation of the female gender with 56.2%, 58.6% of respondents were married and 51.6% had children.

Regarding the results obtained for the linear regression, it is established that the digital marketing communication (DMC) is positively and significantly related to the attitude toward brand (ATB) (r=0.630). Thus, the variations in the DMC Strategy explain the changes in the customer’s attitude toward brand by 39.6% (r²=0.396; p<0.05). These results are consistent with Foroudi (2019), Dalman, Buche & Min (2019), Javed et al (2015), and (Chaudhari and Holbrook, 2001). So, it is possible to accept the proposed hypothesis (H1) since there is theoretical and empirical support to do so (see table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>R² adjusted</th>
<th>Error</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DMC → ATB</td>
<td>0.630</td>
<td>0.396</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>83.64</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own development

With regards to the three dimensions Digital Marketing Communication scale had, results indicate that H2, H3 and H4 can be accepted as all of them proved to be positive and significant. First off, H2 can be accepted as the informative dimension results were β=0.860 with a p < 0.05, therefore results prove to have an impact on the customers attitude toward brand, this information matches the presented by Furoudi (2019), Gilly and Wolfinbarger (1998) and Fombrun (1996) who found that company’s communications are mainly used to share information about the products or services and it all adds up to a better company reputation, therefore becoming respected and trusted (see table 7).

In relation to H3, the results of the entertaining dimension were also positive and significant (β=0.601, p< 0.05), it was not the preponderant dimension, but it is still a significant and determining one. These results are similar to those presented by Cheng, Blankson, Wang, & Chen (2009), the only difference is in this study the “entertaining” dimension is more preponderant than the “annoying” one (see table 7).

Finally, H4 can also be accepted as results for the third dimension, annoyance, were positive and significant as well, β=0.194 with a p < 0.05. This dimension turns out to have the least impact as people who get in touch with a company have an identified necessity. Consequently, they can tolerate more before labeling something as annoying. Results are similar with those in Cheng et al (2009) who state that the dimensions in this scale do impact the customer’s attitude toward a brand. However, unlike Cheng et al (2009), the evidence found in the current research shows that the “annoyance” dimension was the least representative (see table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>β standardized</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.511</td>
<td>-1.801</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative (Inf)</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>15.148</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining (Ent)</td>
<td>0.601</td>
<td>9.328</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoying (Ann)</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>2.792</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own development
The predictive equation that allows estimating the customers’ attitude toward brand in the city of Aguascalientes is:

\[ \text{ATB} = -0.511 + (0.86) \text{Inf} + (0.601) \text{Ent} + (0.194) \text{Ann} + \epsilon_i \]

5. Discussions

In a theoretical sense, it can be noted that the results in this research are similar to the literature consulted, thus, empirically it is concluded that the communication efforts within the digital marketing strategy of any organization explain the changes in the customer’s attitude towards brands that offer online services in 39.6%. Similarly, it is important to highlight the fact that unlike the Asian studies, in which loads rank the dimensions Information, Annoyance and Entertainment based on their effect, in Mexico the informative aspects, followed by the entertaining ones resulted in the greatest burden, whereas how annoying digital marketing communication may be, got the lowest results.

These results are quite relevant for organizations which are currently using any digital platforms or those planning on starting to use them. The research indicates that people prefer “informative” communication efforts rather than “entertaining” ones. On the other hand, there’s evidence this communication has a little impact on how annoyed people may feel (\(\beta=0.194\)). As a conclusion managers and organizations must make sure any communications efforts produced are quite informative and entertaining so that customers feel barely annoyed.

These findings allow defining that digital communication explain roughly 40% of the attitude customers have regarding brands. These variations are mainly because of how rich, information-wise, messages are. It is important to stress that communications efforts must prioritize information over entertainment, as it was evident that people look for information mainly rather than any other thing. Finally, if these efforts are informative and entertaining, the feeling of annoyance can be lessened.

The most important limitation within this research is the fact that only people who had been in contact with brands were surveyed. This allows to identify what potential customers are looking for but does not provide any information about the market in general. That means, surveyed people were already contemplating the fact of acquiring the goods or services the companies offered.

The information above helps define possible future investigations such as surveying people who have not had any exchange with the brands, or maybe just with the ones offering similar services or products. In addition, conducting another research where means of interactive communication are contrasted would also be beneficial, but this type of research should be segmented by the company’s line of business as opinions will surely vary depending on the product or service.

It is important to continue to replicate this kind of research as most companies are using or beginning to use digital platforms. These companies need such information in order for them to make the most out of them. From a customer’s perspective, the information provided in this research allows them to get exactly what they need or are looking for, avoiding wasting time or feeling overwhelmed with information they do not need.

References


