Editorial Introduction: Advances in Theory and Practice of Digital Marketing

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Abstract

This special issue of the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* aims to bring together a variety of disciplines and a scholarly community for the advancement of knowledge regarding practice and research related to digital and social media marketing. Accordingly, the special issue includes papers using a variety of theories, research methods, contexts, and conceptualizations to enrich our understanding of digital and social media marketing from consumer and practitioner perspectives. The thirteen articles accepted for inclusion in this special issue are summarised in this editorial introduction.

Keywords: Digital Consumer Culture; Digital Consumer Engagement; Digital Marketing; eWOM; Mobile Marketing; Recommender Engine; Social Media Marketing

Rapid emergence and widespread adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and digital media are having a significant impact on the way people communicate and fulfil their socio-economic, emotional, and material needs. ICTs and digital media, such as emails, search engines, websites, and social media sites, are already being used widely by individuals for a range of activities including searching daily news and updates on critical events; connecting with family and friends; reviewing products, services and places; selling and buying goods; accessing transportation, tourism, and personal financial services; and workplace management (Kapoor et al., 2017). Furthermore, a radical increase in both temporal and geographical reach is empowering consumers to exert influence on brands, products, and services (Plume et al., 2016). These technologies are also being harnessed by businesses for various purposes including distribution and selling of goods, retailing of consumer services, customer relationship management, and influencing consumer behaviour (Dwivedi et al. 2015, 2017; Grover et al., 2019; Kapoor et al. 2016, 2017; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Shiau et al., 2017, 2018). Thus, with the proliferation of ICTs such as big data, Artificial Intelligence, GPS, Bluetooth, Zigbee, RFID, QR code, and other mobile and Internet connected technologies, marketers can fine-tune their messaging to effectively target micro-consumer segments within the country/locale and deliver hyperlocalized micro-experiences/engagements/services (Singh and Keating, 2018). Accordingly, these

technologies have advanced digital marketing activities such as display advertising, affiliate marketing, search engine marketing, email marketing, social media marketing, and mobile marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2015, 2017; Kapoor et al., 2016; Shareef et al., 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019).

Social media has become a popular channel for marketing and advertising activities (Shareef et al., 2019). Companies face challenges when designing social media advertising to successfully attract customers and motivate them to purchase their brands (Alalwan et al., 2017; Alalwan, 2018; Lee & Hong, 2016; Shareef et al., 2017). Studies have identified and tested factors related to social media advertising that predict purchase intention (Alalwan, 2018; Singh & Swait, 2017). There is also an increasing interest in how to measure the impact and value of social media marketing activities. In that direction, various social media metrics are proposed (Arora et al., 2019; Misirlis & Vlachopoulou, 2018).

Social media changes the way companies do their marketing activities, bringing new challenges and benefits (Arora & Sanni, 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2015, 2017; Hossain et al., 2019; Nisar et al., 2018; Wang & Herrando, 2019). When used incorrectly or by unskilled professionals, digital marketing can affect companies negatively (Aswani et al., 2018). Thus, it is important for companies to develop social media competence (Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015). Companies should pay particular attention to aligning digital marketing strategy with their organisational objectives (Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Thorpe, 2018). When used strategically, social media marketing can result in customer satisfaction and an increase in perceived value (Chen et al. 2019; Pacauskas et al., 2018), co-creation (Kamboj et al., 2018; Rathore et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2017), brand loyalty (Laroche et al., 2013; Shanahan et al., 2019), and positive attitude (Shareef et al., 2018).

Additionally, social media had provided new opportunities for companies to gain consumer insight by studying online user-generated content, eWOM communications (Chang et al. 2017; Liu et al., 2019a; Xu et al., 2017), and online communities (Habibi et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2018). Consumer reviews are a big part of social media, bringing issues of information quality, credibility, helpfulness, and authenticity to the forefront (Ismagilova et al., 2017; Kapoor et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2017). Online reviews can lead to changes in consumers' attitudes and purchase behaviors, affecting companies' performance (Ismagilova et al., 2019b; Kawaf & Istanbulluoglu, 2019; Yerasani et al., 2019).

Digital marketing activities and practices can be affected by a variety of factors. For example, some studies have investigated the effects of new laws on digital marketing (Hemsley, 2018; Sposit, 2018). Additionally, research on social media marketing started paying attention to emerging markets, where the adoption rate of social media marketing is lower in comparison with developed countries (Christino et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019b). Some companies in these countries still rely more on traditional media for advertising of their products and services, as they are more trusted in comparison with social media channels (Ali et al., 2016; Olotewo, 2016).

Technological advancement has resulted in the evolution of consumer behavior through 'digital metamorphosis' leading to the formation of 'Digital Consumer Culture', which is a novel and largely unexplored area presenting fertile ground for academics, researchers, and practitioners interested in understanding this unfolding phenomenon. This special issue of the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* aims to bring together a variety of disciplines and a scholarly community for the advancement of knowledge regarding practice and research related to digital and social media marketing. To achieve this goal, reviews/meta-analysis leading to theory development and empirical papers employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods were welcomed for consideration. The thirteen articles

accepted for inclusion in this special issue are briefly summarised below; they have examined a diverse range of issues related to digital and social media marketing.

The first three studies of this special issue focussed on improving consumer engagement and experience by studying e-servicescape (Tran and Strutton, 2019), factors affecting consumers' brand engagement (Algharabat et al. 2019), and viral advertisement (Kulkarni et al., 2019).

Tran and Strutton (entitled: *Comparing email and SNS users: Investigating e-servicescape, customer reviews, trust, loyalty, and E-WOM*) expand our current knowledge of e-servicescape, which captures the online environmental factors of marketers' websites. This study applied two theories (Stimulus-Organism-Theory and The Network Co-production model of eWOM) to investigate online consumers' perceptions of e-servicescape, trust, E-WOM intentions, and customer loyalty, with both rigor and relevance, using customer data for a single e-tailer. The study examined how e-servicescape differs for two forms of eWOM - for email recipients and social network consumers. The results of the study demonstrated that customer reviews are a crucial part of e-servicescape. The study found that e-servicescape positively affects consumers trust, which in turn affects eWOM intentions and customer loyalty (Tran and Strutton, 2019).

Algharabat et al.'s work (entitled: *Investigating the antecedents of customer brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity in social media*) examined the predictors of customer brand engagement (CBE). Engagement was treated using three dimensions: cognitive processing, affection, and activation. An online survey of 500 Jordanian consumers who are fans of the social media pages of certain brands (i.e., mobile service providers' Facebook pages) was undertaken. Based on the results of SEM analyses, it was found that customer brand engagement is affected by consumer involvement, consumer participation, and self-expressive brand. Additionally, it was found that brand awareness/associations affect perceived quality but not brand loyalty. Based on the results the study advises that to increase a telecommunication company's social media page brand loyalty, brand managers should increase their consumers' level of activation via their Facebook page by conducting more research into levels of satisfaction about network quality, speed, reward systems, data allowances, data downloads, and service plans (Algharabat et al., 2019).

The next article by Kulkarni et al. (entitled: *A typology of viral ad sharers using sentiment analysis*) focused on the cognitive response of consumers generated from viral advertising. This study aims to demonstrate sentiment analysis as a promising tool to quantify consumer responses towards branded viral video advertisements. The study proposed a sentiment-based typology of viral ad sharers. By using the results of an experimental study, it is suggested that sentiment-based measures of consumer responses offer a better prediction of consumers' ad sharing intention compared to the traditional and widely used through-listening method. It also helped identify four distinct segments of viral ad sharers: 'Active', 'Brand-fanatic', 'Content-hungry', and 'Dormant'. It is highlighted that, for creating successful viral campaigns, marketers should consider the distinctive characteristics of these four segments of viral ad sharers in order to identify the right seeds to initiate a viral campaign (Kulkarni et al., 2019).

The next three articles focussed on improving the customer decision-making process, by using a recommender engine (Rajat et al., 2019), improving helpfulness of online reviews (Ismagilova et al. 2019a), and advancing efficiency of recommendation systems (Srivastava et al., 2910)

Rajat et al.'s article (entitled: *Personalized digital marketing recommender engine*) focuses on a recommender engine (RE). REs are systems used in internet-facing platforms (e.g., email, social media,

internet-enabled televisions, online shopping web portals, and online mobile applications) to recommend relevant items that the online customer may find appealing and is likely to purchase. The paper describes a model for delivering real-time personalized marking information concerning the recommended items for online and offline customers, using a blend of selling strategies: up-selling, cross-selling, best-in-class-selling, needs-satisfaction-selling, and consultative-selling. To test the proposed model, Rajat et al. employed an experimental study with 100 online customers of a mid-size healthcare retailer based in India. The results indicated that adoption of the proposed methodology improved average monthly revenue by 34.49%, average order value by 32.79%, and items per order by 1.93%. The study offers insights for marketers and managers, and claims that personalised marketing is not homogenous across demographic boundaries (Rajat et al., 2019).

In Ismagilova et al.'s article (entitled: *Perceived helpfulness of eWOM: Emotions, fairness and rationality*) the authors apply cognitive appraisal theory to investigate how different emotions of the same valence, such as frustration and regret, influence consumer judgment of perceived helpfulness of online reviews. By using a survey experiment method, the study found that regret has a positive effect on helpfulness of both product and service reviews, while frustration has a negative effect. It was also observed that expressed price fairness mediates the relationships between emotions and review helpfulness. Understanding how some emotions can lead to a review being perceived as more helpful will aid the development of more effective retail websites, as more helpful online reviews will be displayed first helping alleviate information overload (Ismagilova et al., 2019a).

Srivastava et al.'s research (entitled: *New perspectives on gray sheep behavior in E-commerce recommendations*) studies gray sheep behavior in the context of e-commerce recommendations. While the recommender system is considered as a great tool to devise strategies to present personalized recommendations to each individual user, there is a certain group of users who can worsen its effectiveness. Users in the system with very poor similarity to the larger chunk of users are known as gray sheep users. The presence of such gray sheep users weakens the quality of recommendations for most of the remaining users. As a result, there is a need for the accurate identification of gray sheep users and their removal from the recommender system. The authors postulated and empirically demonstrated using four experiments how the personality-based user models can be used for identification of grey sheep users and how their removal from the system can help to increase the overall efficiency of collaborative filtering-based recommender systems (Srivastava et al., 2019)

The next two articles have examined issues related to reputation and its effect on the search behavior of consumers (Lallement et al., 2019) and companies' performance (Nisar et al., 2019).

Lallement et al.'s article (entitled: *The interaction between reputation and information search: Evidence of information avoidance and confirmation bias*) investigated the effect of reputation on information search for an experienced good (art events), which is characterized by attributes that cannot be evaluated before the consumption or use of the product. A sample of 1811 respondents was used to examine perceptions of the reputation of a specific performing arts event, pre- and post-information search. The results of structural equation modelling showed that prior reputation only affected the online information search for consumers with no opinion or with a positive opinion of a show's reputation. The findings provide supporting evidence of confirmation bias (between positive information and the information search) and information avoidance theories. Findings highlight that different information strategies should be implemented according to the target, their prior level of information, and opinions. Marketing managers should consider their resource allocation in light of these results (Lallement et al., 2019).

The next article by Nisar et al. (entitled: *Up the ante: Electronic word of mouth and its effects on firm reputation and performance*) examined how different types of eWOM (User-generated content (UGC) and Firm-generated content (FGC)) influence firm reputation (information diversity, valence?). Through applying topic modeling and sentiment analysis, it was found that UGC positively related to valence, whereas the relationship was reversed in FGC. Both information diversity and valence are related to revenue growth, an indicator for firm performance. Reputation also had a positive relationship with user engagement. The study underlines that both FGC and UGC are important for user engagement and firm performance. The findings are noteworthy given that results on the causal relationship between social media and firm performance are yet established firmly (Nisar et al., 2019).

The next three studies focused on issues of credibility and privacy on social media (Sokolova and Kefi; Ismagilova et al., 2019c, Jacobson et al. 2019).

Sokolova and Kefi, in their research (entitled: *Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions*) studied social networking influencers. The study aimed to investigate how perceived credibility and para-social interaction relate to purchase intention. By using profiles of four beauty influencers popular in France and conducting a survey of 1209 female respondents, the study found that credibility is influenced by physical attractiveness and attitude homophily while para-social interaction is influenced by attitude homophily and social attractiveness. Both credibility and para-social interaction have a positive impact on purchase intention. The results of this study could be beneficial for influencers in helping them to adopt more persuasive behavior. It can be also used by brands to understand the persuasive cues related to the influencers who present their products (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019).

The next article by Ismagilova et al. (entitled: *The effect of characteristics of source credibility on consumer behavior: A meta-analysis*) synthesized findings from existing studies on the characteristics of source credibility of eWOM communications in a single model by employing meta-analysis. By analyzing data from 20 research papers using Comprehensive Meta-Analysis software, it was found that source expertise, trustworthiness, and homophily significantly influence perceived eWOM usefulness and credibility, intention to purchase, and information adoption. The results of this study add to existing knowledge of the influence of source characteristics on consumer behavior, which will advance our understanding of information processing (Ismagilova et al., 2019c).

Jacobson et al.'s work (entitled: *Social media marketing: Who is watching the watchers?*) aimed to identify consumers' perceptions of using social media data for marketing purposes. The study found that consumers' perceived risks and benefits of using social media have a relationship with their comfort with marketers using their publicly available social media data. The study introduces a new construct of high importance for future marketing research: marketing comfort. Marketing comfort is an individual's comfort with the use of information posted publicly on social media for targeted advertising, customer relations, and opinion mining. It was found that privacy concerns, self-disclosure, and gratification affect marketing comfort. The results confirm that, even though people are assessing their risks with the practice, they are willing to compromise some privacy because they also derive benefits from social media use. By understanding what drives consumer comfort with this emerging marketing practice, the research proposes strategies for marketers that can support and mitigate consumers' concerns so that consumers can maintain trust in marketers' digital practices (Jacobson et al., 2019).

The final two studies examined issues related to mobile marketing (Johnson et al., 2019; Grover and Kar, 2019).

Johnson et al.'s article (entitled: *Exploring flow in the mobile interface context*) studied flow in the context of the mobile interface (MI). Flow is the state of becoming "lost" in an activity that occurs when an individual's skills are matched with the task's level of challenge. The study aims to determine aspects of mobile interfaces (MIs) promoting the flow state. This paper develops the initial version of the MI flow inventory (MIFI), which contains traits of MIs that are posited to lead to the flow state. The study established the face validity of the MIFI by surveying expert panelists in a modified Delphi approach. The authors also provide preliminary evidence for the predictive validity of the MIFI, by showing that users rating a given MI higher on the MIFI traits also reported more flow experiences while using the MI. This is an important contribution and provides insights for both researchers and practitioners (Johnson et al., 2019).

Grover and Kar's article (entitled: *User engagement for mobile payment service providers – introducing the social media engagement model*) explores the dynamics of social media marketing in terms of content type, content frequency, user engagement, user participation, and user retention for mobile wallet firms marketing on Twitter. The study statistically validated the proposed conceptual model using Twitter data from the top four Indian mobile wallet firms. The study found that the frequency of content does not matter, but the content type does. Thus, companies should post a mix of informational, entertainment, remuneration, and social content. User participation increases social promotions in the online community. Therefore, firms should try to increase network size on Twitter and should strategically use their Twitter handle, because followers of the firms can act as an intermediary in spreading the information to other users, subsequently leading to social promotions. User retention decays exponentially over time, therefore periodic campaigning is needed by the firms (Grover and Kar, 2018).

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