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Social Networking as a Marketing Tool: Study of Participation in Cultural Events Promoted by Facebook

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Abstract

This paper addresses the topic of Social Networking as a Marketing tool studying the participation in cultural events disseminated through social networks, specifically by Facebook.

After a theoretical framework, we propose a conceptual model that identifies and analyses the assumptions of this research.

It is argued that "the reading of an invitation to a an event received through Facebook is positively influenced by being sent by a friend", "users who regularly read invitations to cultural events received through Facebook, are the ones that more often accept and participate in the same events", the main reasons that lead users to accept invitations to cultural events through Facebook are: "receive invitations by someone known", "interest in the event and comments from friends about that event" and "comments from friends positively influence the acceptance and participation in cultural events for which they received invitation".

The results are relevant to cultural institutions and professionals in organizing events. These should pay particular attention to studies in order to work more effectively the advantages of the disclosure of events and marketing campaigns through social networks.

We conclude that Facebook is considered a good way to promote cultural events.

Keywords

Social Networks, Cultural Events, Facebook, Marketing, Participation in Cultural Events, Promotion of Cultural Events.

Introduction

In the last decades our lives are undergoing profound changes on the technological, economical, cultural, politic and personal levels.

This paper seeks to reflect on the participation in cultural events that are promoted through social networks. Understanding the factors that lead users from Facebook to accept invitations for cultural events and participate in these same events. In carrying out this research will be investigated the practical case of Facebook, by applying a questionnaire to their users.

When talking about events, is important to know the meaning of the word "event". According to Duarte (2009), an event is perceived as the celebration of a special event, as when one speaks of an event, it is a deliberated landmark, planned and organized. Cultural events are those who have a relationship with a subject related to any of the arts (music, painting, sculpture, film, etc.), these are the kind of events with most interest to the present study. The digital age has brought significant changes in the world of communication and has changed also the habits of human beings. From the evolution of the media until the arrival of computers, the ways to produce and distribute information have undergone major transformations. People accustomed to dealing only with traditional means of communication are now faced with the computer and multimedia phenomena affecting production methods and the relationship between themselves and the world.

Digital Marketing - A New World to Exchange Ideas

Social networks are one of the most used collaborative applications (Costa & Alturas, 2010) and have become increasingly popular in recent years, providing an efficient and user-friendly way to maintain social connections and share information (Benson et al., 2010), allowing the construction of an identity through a profile or a personal page (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The social networks and digital marketing are creating a new world to exchange ideas. Everyone with Internet access now have a voice to share their experiences and opinions. This new social media content uses the latest Internet technology to create a complex image of their product offerings. If companies are not involved and aware of the latest tendencies in social media, may be losing the opportunity to attract a new and "connected" public. Thus managers cannot afford the luxury of ignoring the impact that social networking can have on their activities (Barnes & Barnes, 2009), and social networks are attracting the attention of large Internet Companies like Yahoo and Google (Sledgianowski & Kulviwat, 2009).

Carrera (2009), considers that social networks are a perfect channel of Digital Marketing and include for example the following means: Business blogs, tagging, social bookmarking, social networking (Facebook, LinkedIn), wikis (Wikipedia).

As evidenced by many authors, viral marketing works as a strong marketing technic that seems to create a methodology of practices in spreading the message (Woerndl et al., 2008). This way it meets all the conditions to be advantageous regarding the promotion of cultural events. It is beneficial as there is an establishment of a network that spreads messages free of charge. The exchange between the supplier and the consumer is only indirectly, consumers take the role of intermediaries and the supplier firm only contacts the first users.

According to O'Reilly et al. (2003), another term used for the technique "mouth to mouth" is the "buzz marketing" as other communication activities considered by guerrilla, the "buzz marketing"

has emerged as an alternative to traditional marketing and communication campaigns, which were essentially based on advertising. Being one of the new communication techniques, it is not yet possible to point large theoretical references, however is possible to make reference to noted authors and professionals in this area, such as Mark Burdett or Mark Hughes. According to these authors, buzz marketing is a marketing strategy that encourages individuals to pass a message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in both the exhibition and the influence of the message (O'Reilly et al., 2003).

Internet as a tool of diffusion and sharing: Web 2.0 and Prosumer Generation

The Internet is increasingly becoming a basis of host-content generated by users. Blogs and virtual communities on the Internet are examples of such forms of storage, dissemination and promotion via the Internet. The traditional means of sharing content are being revolutionized by the Internet, where information access and sharing is gradually eased. A vast network of information and basis of influence takes place today in the virtual world (virtual communities, blogs, forums, etc.) forcing the markets to rethink the traditional ways of promoting content (Gonçalves, 2009).

This way, the Internet becomes a central platform for communication and socialization among users. Thus, the publication of content may be a useful source of promotion and marketing. The rapid spread of the Internet and the emergence of various social constructs facilitated by its technologies are changing the conditions that define the marketing techniques. The Internet meets conditions to be very effective regarding the dissemination of content and promotion. We can say that it may take a key role, as the platform to the construction of effective viral marketing techniques (Gonçalves, 2009)

Web 2.0, came to enhance information sharing, but more than that came to develop a new generation - the prosumer generation (producer-consumer). With the prosumer generation, with the Internet and with Web 2.0, emerges the concept Consumer-Generated Media (CGM). This term is used to describe the content that is created and disseminated by the consumers themselves. The essence of being a prosumer is to prefer producing one's own goods and services (Kotler, 1986). Professionals need to become prosumer's and must know how to use the full potential of their clients "opinion leaders"(Cardoso et al., 2005). It is a generation that likes and has power to review, that wants to be beside the marks and no longer accepts not receiving added value for products they purchase (Cardoso et al., 2005).

Research question and hypotheses

The main question of this study is: What are the main factors leading to the acceptance of invitations and participation in cultural events promoted through Facebook?

Following this question and after reviewing the literature, four hypotheses were developed for this study:

(H1) The reading of an invitation to an event received through Facebook is positively influenced by the fact that has been sent by a "friend".

(H2) Users who regularly read the invitations to cultural events that they receive through Facebook, are the ones that accept and participate in these same events".

(H3) The main reasons that lead users to accept invitations to cultural events made through Facebook are: receiving invitations from someone known, interest in the event and comments from friends about the event.

(H4) The comments from "friends" positively influence the acceptance and participation in cultural events for which he received the invitation.

Based on these hypotheses we developed a conceptual model, which identifies the factors that influence the Facebook users to accept invitations to cultural events through social networks and participate in these events. For the construction of the model we didn't start from any other previously tested, but from several relationships between the variables defined for this study. Figure 1 (appendix) presents the proposed conceptual model which represents the relationships between variables (dimensions) in the study.

Methodological considerations

After reviewing the literature was used as a method of data collection to query the data using a questionnaire developed for this investigation, which was applied to the users of Facebook during the months of May and June of 2010.

The methodological approach of this study was defined in two phases:

- To know which are the determining factors in accepting a sent invitation through Facebook to a particular cultural event and what kind of cultural events the users would like to receive invitations through Facebook, we performed a preliminary study. This study consisted of sending two questions to a random sample of 50 users of Facebook, which 34 responses were obtained with the answers to these two questions. This way, the variables to consider in some questions in the questionnaire, had their origin in the common responses collected in the preliminary study.

- Quantitative phase, based on the application of a questionnaire that was created based on a literature and information gathered in the previous phase. The construction of the questionnaire was done so that was composed primarily of closed questions or indicators, thereby helping to quantify the most significant variables.

For the present study it was used a platform of questionnaires on the Internet, namely the Google Docs, where the questionnaire was created and afterwards staying the same available online. Later, it was reported the existence of the questionnaire access link to the users of Facebook.

Findings

The sample that served as the basis for this study consists of 396 Facebook users. Were presented to respondents a few reasons that may or may not be the main reasons for them to use Facebook. After analyzing the data, we highlight the five main reasons: "to be closer to my friends' (40.4%)," share ideas "(26.5%)," for fun "(25, 5%), "part of social networks" (20.5%) and "learning new things" (19.9%).

Although not being considered one of the top five reasons to use Facebook, some reasons presented by the respondents are quite relevant to the findings of this study, namely, "to receive invitations to several cultural events" and "send invitations to several cultural events". About 42.9% of respondents considered this aspect as a reason for using the Facebook, and 2% of total respondents indicated this as the main reason for using this social network, in other words a small

percentage of Facebook users attend this social network primarily to receive invitations to various cultural events.

In relation to sending invitations to events, only 27.8% indicated this aspect as a reason to use Facebook, and of these 27.8%, only 4.5% reported this to be the main reason for using this social network.

Regarding the reading of invitations, about 28.3% said they regularly read the invitations received, 26% said they always read them and 25% said they read almost every time. A small percentage of respondents (2.8%) never read the invitations received to cultural events.

Following the reading of an invitation, we evaluated the response to invitations that are the subject of reading by respondents. Thus, according to the results, it was found that respondents rarely respond invitations that they read (27%), and 25.3% almost always respond to them and 21.2% regularly respond to invitations received and read.

Most respondents (48.5%) and seldom take part in cultural events for which he was invited, and 31.6% accept the invitations and regularly participate in these events.

Regarding the degree of agreement of Facebook users on the dissemination of cultural events through this social network, 68.9% of respondents revealed that they agree that "Facebook is a good way to promote cultural events". Regarding the fact that more cultural entities promote their events in social networks, 55.6% of respondents agree with this statement. About 66.2% of respondents also agree that entities should promote their cultural events through Facebook, stating that the marketers should also promote the events through this social network (69.7%). The participation in events in function of receiving invitations, 53.8% believe that if they receive more invitations they participate in more events.

In the total of 396 respondents, 24% said they receive more invitations to cultural events through other media than by Facebook. It should also be noted that 19.4% of users consider that they receive more invitations to cultural events through Facebook than other means of dissemination.

Correlation Analysis – Validation of the Study Hypotheses

The first step in inductive analysis was the realization of several Pearson correlations, with the objective to correlate the different variables thereby testing the hypotheses under study. The correlation permits to obtain a measure (correlation coefficients: Pearson's r) through which it determines the strength or intensity of an association (Bryman & Cramer, 2001).

In this sense, we proceeded to the bivariate analysis beginning to examine whether the reading of a invitation for a cultural event received through Facebook is positively influenced by the fact that has been sent by a "friend". Regarding the correlation between these two variables, as can be seen in Table 1, there is also a positive relationship since the correlation between these two variables is significant at 1%. This result shows that most respondents who receive invitations to cultural events through its "friends, "reads such invitations when they receive them, thus verifying hypothesis 1 of this study (Table 1- appendix).

To determine whether the "reading received invitations to cultural events through Facebook, positively influence the acceptance and participation in them" (H2) were correlated the two variables "reading invitations to cultural events" and "acceptance of invitations and participation in cultural events", as can be seen on Table 2 (appendix).

According to the results presented in Table 2 it can be verified that the correlation between reading invitations to cultural events when users receive them and the acceptance and participation in them is significant at 1 %. Validating a positive correlation, which indicates that the majority of respondents who read the Invitations to cultural events is associated with a higher rate of individuals participating in cultural events. This correlation validates hypothesis 2 of this study.

Regarding Hypothesis 3 "The main reasons that lead users to accept invitations to cultural events made through Facebook are: receiving invitations from someone known, interest in the event and comments from friends about that event", it was possible to verify and validate this hypothesis through the descriptive analysis presented above. According to the results presented in the descriptive analysis, the main reasons for the acceptance of invitations to cultural events were the following: "Interest in the event", "receiving invitations from friends", "receiving invitations of pages or groups that give rise to some interest".

This way, we can conclude that hypothesis 3 is not entirely true, since the statement "the comments from friends about a particular cultural event" was not refered as a reason that leads to the acceptance and participation in events.

Another important aspect in the analysis of the results was to verify the existence of a positive relationship between the comments of "Friends" and the "participation in more events since the reception of invitations is done through Facebook".

Table 3 (appendix) presents the correlation between these two variables, where we can see that the comments from "friends" about an event positively influence the participation in cultural events since the invitations are made through Facebook, once its relationship is significant at 1%. Thus, there is a positive correlation, indicating that the majority of respondents who read the comments of their "friends" are more easily influenced to the acceptance and participation in cultural events. Thus, we can conclude that hypothesis 4 is also true.

Conclusion

Facebook is a marketing tool, which can be used to create "buzz". With this study, it appears that social networks are opening new opportunities for marketing. This way regarding to the dissemination and promotion of cultural events through Facebook, we conclude that:

- The majority of respondents, who receive invitations to cultural events through its "friends", read these invitations when they receive them.

The correlation between reading invitations to cultural events when users receive them and the acceptance and participation in them is a positive correlation, indicating that the majority of respondents who read the Invitations to cultural events is associated with a higher rate of individuals participating in cultural events.

- The main reasons that lead users to accept invitations to cultural events made by Facebook are receiving invitations from someone known, interest in the event and comments from friends about that event.

- The comments from "friends" about an event positively influence the participation in cultural events since the invitations are made through Facebook.

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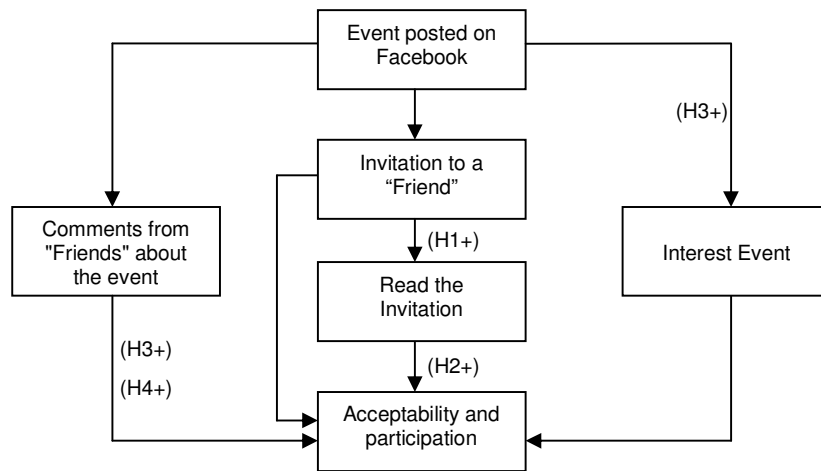
Appendix

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model Proposed

Table 1- Correlation between receiving invitations to cultural events through "friends" and the reading of the same invitations

		Invitation to a "Friend"	Read the Invitation
Invitation to a "Friend"	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig.		
	N	396	
Read the Invitation	Pearson Correlation	0,313[**]	1
	Sig.	0,000	
	N	383	383

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 - Correlation between reading invitations to cultural events and acceptability/participation

		Read invitations to cultural events when receive	Acceptability and participation
Read invitations to cultural events when receive	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig.		
	N	383	
Acceptability and participation	Pearson Correlation	0,376[**]	1
	Sig.	0,000	
	N	379	380

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 - Correlation between the comments of "friends" and participation in events

		Comments from my friends about the event	I participate in more events as long as I get invitations by Facebook
Comments from my friends about the event	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig.		
	N	395	
I participate in more events as long as I get invitations by Facebook	Pearson Correlation	0,145**	1
	Sig.	0,004	
	N	382	382

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).