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A New Perspective for Marketing: The Impact of Social Media on Customer Experience

ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of social media on customer experience and how companies can use social media to enhance the experience of customers.

Methodology: Literature synthesis method was followed to trace out and analyse the data. The EBSCO Discovery of Science and Google Scholar databases were used to find the articles. Over thirty articles were produced from the total (190) search query results after applying limiters, deleting duplicates, and enforcing non-business settings.

Findings: Social media has a considerable impact on customer experience due to its widespread and easy access by customers. It enabled companies to classify customers, get a lot of information about them, and get very fast feedback about their impressions related to their product or services. Social media may have a positive or negative impact on customer experience, so the role of management is important to manage these media in a way that will benefit the company and support it to achieve its objectives.

Value Added: This article provides a clear picture on exploring the impact of social media on customer experience. The results of the research can be used to guide companies on how to use social media to enhance the experience of customers.

Recommendations: Companies should smartly manage social media and employ qualified staff to improve the customer's experience and avoid the side effects that this type of media may have on customer experience. In addition, customer experience should be a strategic goal because it helps the company meet its overall goals.

Key words: social media, customer experience, marketing

JEL codes: M31, M30, M1

Introduction

Customer experience is a construct that started to attract a lot of attention in the last century and until now. It plays an important role in the way customers

deal with, evaluate, and trust the company. Many researchers highlight the importance of customer experience as it affects the process of service evaluation (Veríssimo & Menezes, 2016). Recently, the focus of marketing practice has transformed from creating fast-moving customer product brands to building customer relationships through service marketing and creating good customer experience (Maklan & Klaus, 2014). Customer experience contributes to the customer's assessment of the offered product or service value. This can highly affect the customer's purchase decision. Customers tend to compare their experience with different companies. Customers need to express their expectations and points of view about products and services. The interaction between companies and customers allows the customer to assess the experience over time and across channels (Maklan & Klaus, 2014). Customer experience is a goal-oriented process that has an effect on customer loyalty and focuses on forming positive behavioural intentions. As a result, this will affect the future relationship between the company and its customers. Besides, customer experience is an important strategic objective. It is highly attributed to customer satisfaction and the company-customer relationship (Maklan & Klaus, 2014). Nowadays, with the huge spread of social media platforms, social media has changed or affected customer experience management; social media offers opportunities for positive experience that can lead to a long-term relationship which involves product information search, purchase transaction, and/or service delivery (Rose, Hair, & Clark, 2011). Regarding customer experience, little attention has been paid to online customer experiences compared to face-to-face ones. Social media platforms are a way of communication and interaction between people. It facilitates the way for companies to interact with their customers and offer services like online purchases, online pay, and product search. With the increase in the use of social media in the world, companies have started to put effort into enhancing customer experience through social media platforms and internet websites in general (Rose, Hair, & Clark, 2011).

Although the impact of social media on customer experience is a highly fundamental topic in marketing, there is still a lack of research done on this issue. This may be due to the idea that companies still do not have extensive

experience in dealing with online customers. In addition, social media is improving rapidly, and every day new technologies and applications arise. Therefore, there is always something new to learn about companies.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- How has social media impacted customer experience?
- Do social media platforms, in some cases, harm customer experience?
- How do companies compete with one another in enhancing the customer experience of their customers through social media?

Methodology

Literature synthesis is pursued to trace out data from databases and to make a synthesis. The primary databases utilised to search articles are EBSCO's discovery of science and Google Scholar. Among the databases in it, the emphasis was put on more business-related databases: academic search complete, business source premium and science direct. The search topics used for searching include social media, customer's experience, and social media's impact on customer experience. The total records or search results observed from databases were narrowed down using the limiters such as years from 2000–2021, since social media are a recent phenomenon. Also, the course or discipline option includes only Marketing, Management, and business. The "relevance of the topic" and the time of publication "latest" are applied in the selection process. Out of the total search queries result, which is 190, after imposing adequate limiters, removing duplicates and none-business settings, over 30 articles were synthesized.

Literature review

Customer experience

Nowadays, with the increase in the need to focus on customer value, managers tend to construct creative ideas that can enhance the relationship between companies and customers (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002). "A company's first step toward managing the total customer experience is recognizing the clues it is sending to customers" (Bery, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002). This means that there are areas that managers can shed some light on to manage and develop customer experience. First, the company should understand the customer's journey, which starts with the expectations of the customer before purchasing, then the experience and the assessment after the process of purchase is completed. These hints or information can greatly assist the organization in developing a customer experience, gaining customer satisfaction, and dealing with competitive threats (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002).

Customer experience management: The challenge of enhancing customer's customer experience

The first one is concerned with the function of the product or service. The second one is concerned with the emotional aspect, which means the smell, taste, and texture of the good or service, in addition to the environment where the product or service is offered. In the process of "purchase", customers always have an experience with the company. This experience can be good or sometimes bad. The fundamental issue here is how the company can manage this experience and organize clues and information to develop the company-customer relationship and get rid of any disappointments (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002). Companies compete in the aspect of customer experience management to gain customers' loyalty. This is somehow more difficult than product or service enhancement because the holistic nature of these experiences makes them difficult to copy by companies (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002). Creating positive customer experience is a fundamental
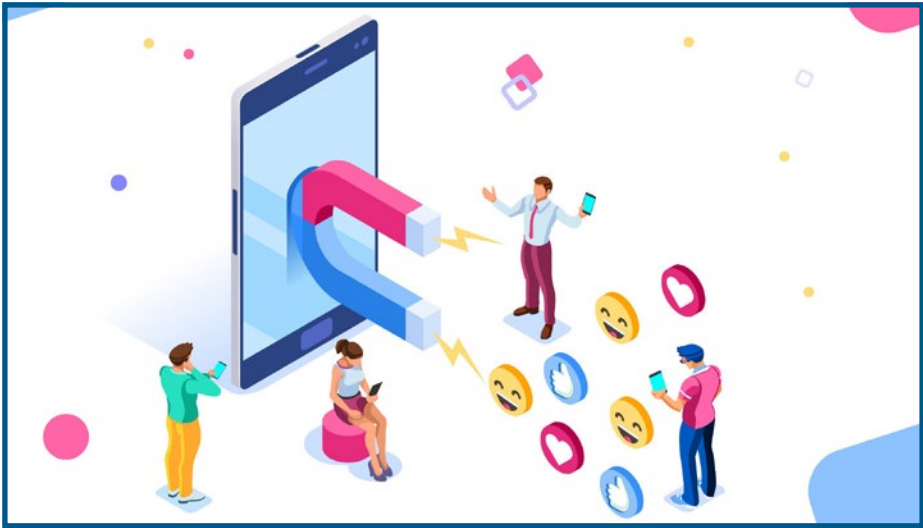
issue. Customers interact through many touchpoints, and this needs a better understanding of their behaviours and customer journeys, as there are now more complex customer journeys (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Salvietti, Ieva, & Ziliani, 2021). Customer experience managers are responsible for managing the experience of their customers. Researchers focus on explanatory attempts to measure the experience. It has been said that customer experience is one of the most researched challenges due to the increase and complexity of customer touchpoints, so creating strong and positive customer experiences will result in improving the customer journey at multiple touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Salvietti, Ieva, & Ziliani, 2021). According to Abbott (1955), customer experience is based on the idea that "what people desire are not products but satisfying experiences." The emotional aspect of human behaviour is highly influential in the customer's decision-making and experience. There are multiple definitions of the concept of "customer experience." It is a multidimensional and holistic construct that requires the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical responses to the retailer (Verhoef et al., 2009; Rojas, Quiñones, & Rusu, 2021). According to Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009), customer experience is a subjective and behavioural response of a customer to brand-related stimuli that is part of a brand's design. In the area of marketing, customer experience is integrated with customer satisfaction, customer equity, service quality, and relationship management. As mentioned above, customer experience process starts with the pre-purchase, then the purchase, and finally the post-purchase in the customer journey. In each stage of this experience, the customer interacts with different touchpoints depending on the nature of the product or service, such as brand-owned, partner-owned, and customer-owned ones. Customer experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company. The direct one means the direct contact that is usually initiated by a customer during the purchase. On the other hand, indirect contact means word of mouth or unplanned encounters with representations of a company's products and services (Meyer & Schwager, 2007; Rojas, Quiñones, & Rusu, 2021; Cambra, Polo, & Trifu, 2021).

Enhancing online customer experience: A social and sensory approach

Social media has evolved into an integral aspect of people's life in the modern day. Due to its significant influence on retail, businesses are increasingly investing more resources in optimizing online consumer experience. The core idea here is the capacity to turn a page visitor into a buyer. Some design elements contribute to this process, like visual stimuli (Bleier, Harmeling, & Palmatier, 2018; Nagy & Hajdu, 2021). Online customer experience represents the customer's subjective, multidimensional psychological response to the online presence of a product or service. This experience also has a social and sensory appeal, as the pages involve photos, videos, and comparison materials of the presented product or service. The essential technique here is how every product or service can be offered in a way that enhances customer experience and online shopping (Nagy & Hajdu, 2021). Customers have a chance to evaluate a product or service based on how it is offered online rather than on their physical experience. On the other hand, customers may be uncertain about the accuracy or truthfulness of the offered materials. Uncertainty arises in online shopping rather than in offline shopping because consumers cannot deal physically with products: they cannot feel or touch them, so they are not sure about their assessment of the offered products in the pre-purchase phase (Bleier, Harmeling, & Palmatier, 2018; Cambra, Polo, & Trifu, 2021). This problem varies between products because some products need more physical experience than others. The physical separation that online shopping is associated with requires customers to have faith in the product web pages and, in turn, stimulates companies to work more professionally on improving their social media pages to reduce such a gap and make their products more attractive despite the physical separation from customers (Kim, Bai, & Han, 2021).

Figure 1. Social media impact

Source: Author's creation.

The company's social media platform can include elements like verbal or visual stimuli that provide the building material of the page or app (see Figure 1). According to the study by Bleier, Harmeling, & Palmatier (2018), the results show that a product's type and brand trustworthiness affect each experience dimension, which, as a result, impacts the customers' purchase. Due to that, marketers should use design elements strategically to have specific types of experiences for different products and brands. Moreover, videos have the strongest effect on the sensory experience of customers. Sellers should design elements that are informative and can entertain the customer, in addition to how online design elements can be used to drive purchase behaviours by customizing experiences according to the product being sold (Silvia, 2019; Wibowo et al., 2020; Bate & Balawi, 2022). The way content is shared by the company on social media is highly important, as it affects the way customers interact with the company and what it offers. As a result, this interaction by customers can lead to either a positive or negative experience.

Also, Plessis & Vries (2016) conducted a study in South Africa that focused on designing the form of a holistic CEM (Customer Experience Management)

framework. The results clarified that the service experience occurs at the point where the customer and enterprise meet. Besides, there are moderators like customer perceptions that influence the customer's service expectations, which in turn affect the perceived quality of the experience. The study also revealed that there is a model called the "Enterprise-Customer Service Model" that focuses on the customer-enterprise relationship and indicates that the service experience occurs at the point where the customer and the enterprise meet (Plessis & Vries, 2016). Managing customer experience is highly important because it acts as a moderator between companies and customers. Customers base their purchases on their previous experiences with the company. Due to that, companies should focus on the needs of the customer plus how they can offer the needed products or services in a way that attracts the customer, leads to a positive customer experience, and maintains customers' loyalty. Social media facilitated the way for companies to present and offer their products and services in various ways, e.g. through photos, videos, and in many other ways. Moreover, social media gives customers a huge platform on which they can review their desired products and interact easily with the company (Kim, Bai, & Han, 2021).

According to Meyer and Schwager (2007), customer's attention needs a closed-loop process that focuses on delivering a good experience. Their study focuses on describing the customer experience process through three kinds of customer monitoring, which are: past patterns, present patterns, and potential patterns. The main goal of this experience is to provide the end-user with positive experience. The study also shows that a successful brand shapes customers' experiences by offering fundamental value propositions in every feature. Also, the way a company delivers its content to its customers is highly effective in terms of the consumption rate. Customers are attracted by the presentation of the product more than the product itself. In addition, customers are affected by the experiences of other customers found on social media. The company should keep in touch with the new trends in the technology of such important media so that they will be able to have more updates about their customers' needs and how they can offer their products to them in an innovative way. Social media in the scope of customer experience is used to collect data for

customer experience management; data can be collected, analysed, and distributed to monitor the progress of every process. Companies can recognize what their customers usually buy so that they can classify them. In contrast, companies cannot monitor or classify customers' emotions, thoughts, or general states of mind. They can monitor the subjective experiences of customers through what they write, review, and comment on social media platforms (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Recent research has looked into how people share their experiences on social media. Customers' subjective experience or knowledge is highly influential in the domain of consumption. On social media, written opinions and reviews shared by customers are computer-mediated, which means that they are based on check-in facilities like self-service technology. Trust is associated with the tendency to offer positive word of mouth (subjective experience). In their study, Lin and Oliveira (2014) aimed at investigating the consumption experience and understanding of customers' participation through comments in online consumption communities. The results revealed that the ease of online consumption and "perceived usefulness" are fundamental moderators of the experience and the relationship between companies and customers. Also, social media platforms involve electronic word of mouth, through which firms can set up their online community sites and help customers create and disseminate their knowledge. They can also encourage innovators to share their experiences online. As an example, companies can encourage and enhance their customers' sharing of experiences online by classifying them into, for example, silver, gold, and diamond ones based on the frequency of their participation and activation on the company website (Lin & Oliveira, 2014). By using these strategies, customers will be encouraged to be active on and monitor social media platforms. Thus, when they comment or write a review about their positive experience with the company, they will encourage other customers to purchase from and have experience with that company (Civelek et al., 2020).

Discussion

The increasing focus on social media has shifted the ways companies interact with their targeted customers. Social media has become a fundamental part of creating a successful and competitive area of marketing and customer experience enhancement (Pütter, 2017). Therefore, companies put much more effort into how they can utilize social media to enhance customer experience, improve branding and marketing approaches, and investigate customers' buying intentions. Moreover, companies try to create approaches in which they can value the use of social media platforms to keep in touch with the latest updates about their target group. Marketing, advertising, and promotion strategies focus on how technology can be used to influence customers' behaviour and enhance their experiences. The use of technology around the world has led to a big change in how the company and its customers work together and how the customer experience has changed.

Nowadays, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have become the most widely used social media platforms. These platforms are considered the core sources of online information, so companies are now creating more social and content methods that can increase the appeal of their products to customers. Moreover, the use of social media platforms impacted word-of-mouth and customer-to-customer communication. In 2017, the global social network audience was estimated to be around 2.55 billion people. Social media platforms can be modified to generate content for users, and these platforms can be used as a marketing tool for companies to direct the process of purchase and enhance the customer experience. Companies are more competitive in using social media to attract customers (Yurdagul, 2019). Every company has the challenge of working on how they can present or deliver the content of the offered product or service in an attractive way for customers to follow. It should be noted that social media platforms have made it easier and more convenient for businesses to communicate with their customers. For example, the company can monitor what customers write about products and services; companies can benefit from the positive comments as readers or other customers will be encouraged by other experiences (Zilber, Monken, & Quevedo-Silva, 2019;

Zubiaga, 2019). On the other hand, negative comments can be a challenge for companies, so every enterprise should put more effort into monitoring comments and reviews. They should also try to interact with what customers write, and solve any problems that may arise (Zubiaga, 2019; Grewal, Stephen, & Coleman, 2019).

Due to the vast use of social media, companies now hire employees who are responsible for monitoring and evaluating the process of marketing through social media platforms. These employees are called "social media specialists." Through social media, both customers and companies now have access to improve or develop the revenue of the company themselves. Building a positive customer experience here is highly fundamental due to the new idea that both customers and companies are moderators of social media platforms, and they can both affect customer experience (Chen & Lin, 2019; Wibowo et al., 2020). Moreover, social media has impacted the way marketers design their strategies and approaches and how they can deliver brand information to enhance consumer experience. Most companies now depend on social media in the process of branding and customer experience enhancement. Facebook has provided a new way of introducing brand-related content and creating exchanges with consumers. Reviews that customers add to the company's page are highly influential. Companies concentrate their efforts on having customers with a good appeal of what they offer because when the customer has positive experience, he or she will share it and recommend other people or customers to try an experience with that company (Jacobson, Gruzd, & Hernández-García, 2020). Customers are now more active on social networking than five or ten years ago. Currently, they tend to share every experience they have had, and they try to recommend or sometimes write about any bad or negative experiences they have had. Due to this shift, customers are involved in the process of branding rather than the company by itself. They draw the line for companies on the alternations and adjustments that should be made to a product or service (Koetz, 2019). The company takes in these reviews and comments because they are like feedback on the offered product and service. The most important objective for companies now is to have customers with positive experience, and firms always try to enhance the experience as it highly contributes to

branding and marketing. With customer experience enhancement, companies can enlarge the circle of their customers because, with the impact of social media, experiences are now shared in public on social media, where millions of people can reach and see them. Customers' responses are feedback on their experience; businesses are now attempting to build a sense of belonging with their customers. Customers' loyalty depends on the relationship between customers and companies (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2020; Jacobson et al., 2020). When customers have a good experience with what is offered, they will be encouraged to stay loyal to the company and recommend it to their family and friends (Jacobson, Gruzd, & Hernández-García, 2020). Social media gives customers and companies the trait of publicity. Before the popularization of social media, customers were able to ask for help and recommendations by using or contacting customer service or care department. Nowadays with the presence of social media, customers can benefit from other experiences that are posted on social media platforms. In addition, these experiences of customers are no longer unique; they are shared in public, and millions of people can see, read, and benefit from them. Companies should bear in mind that they need to manage customers' interactions on social media quickly and creatively. This means that the company needs to monitor how customers interact and what their concerns and problems are so that they can solve them (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2020). Furthermore, companies can improve customer experience on social media by using some technological tools that can enhance the customer-company relationship. Companies may use technology for the distribution of their public services. They can also use other types of social media like newsgroups and communication groups to expand the area of their business (Balawi, 2020, pp. 18–25).

Furthermore, the Internet and social media have changed the way companies interact with their customers. They now deal with abstract customers. This means that face-to-face communication is now reduced, and online relations are currently the new face of customer-company relations. It is not an easy task for companies to deal with the customer behind the screen; this relationship lacks body language, facial expressions, and eye contact. Due to that, there is more effort put by companies into their interaction and enhancement of

customer experience (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2020). Ultimately, companies can enhance customer experience through applying tools and strategies like asking for feedback, being proactive with customers, offering the best deals for the best customers, and staying competitive and interactive to keep their clients and improve their positive customer experience.

Conclusion

The current and rapid use of social media has impacted all aspects of human lives, and the number of social media active users is exponentially increasing. One of the fundamental aspects of marketing that is affected by social media is customer experience. Customer experience highly impacts the buying intentions of customers and the relationship between companies and customers. With the increase of social media users worldwide, social media platforms have become a valuable and inevitable tool in enhancing customer experience. Companies now use social media extensively to enhance the experiences of their customers (Bate & Balawi, 2022). Through comments, reviews, and recommendations, companies can get feedback about the experiences of customers. Customers themselves become a part of the branding and marketing process. They search on platforms like Facebook and YouTube to gather information about companies and what they offer in terms of products or services, as well as the experiences of other customers, whether they are good or bad, about the companies' products or services. Customers can be highly affected by what is written on social media, like bad comments or negative experiences of other customers. Additionally, the competition between companies using social media has rapidly increased to enhance customer experience. Companies can search for what customers need or like through social media, but the most important point is the way in which companies utilize social media platforms to enhance customer experience and maintain it as positive as possible, avoiding anything that may harm it related to companies' products or services. In this regard, businesses must have highly qualified personnel with extensive

experience in this field to manage these media in a smart and effective manner, as well as employ creative ideas constantly to promote customer experience. Finally, companies need to consider customer experience as a strategic objective and provide all the necessary resources and means to enhance it since it supports the company in meeting other objectives. Other research can be conducted on how social media has impacted the marketing strategies of companies and how this shift has affected the jobs of people in the companies' marketing departments.

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