

Emerging Issues in Digital Marketing

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Introduction

This Special Issue of the *Journal of Consumer Marketing (JCM)* represents a selection of best papers presented at the 2016 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) annual conference in Christchurch, New Zealand. Around 400 delegates from 28 countries attended this internationally recognised conference hosted by the Department of Management, Marketing & Entrepreneurship at the University of Canterbury. The conference theme, "Marketing in a Post-Disciplinary Era", identified the circumstances and challenges marketing researchers and practitioners face in theory and practice. Marketing exists in an environment that is constantly evolving, and it interfaces strategically with management, entrepreneurship, psychology, tourism, law, economics, finance, politics and other social science disciplines. Disciplines like engineering and natural sciences now recognise that business knowledge significantly contributes to the success of new discoveries and innovation. Increasingly, governments and research bodies encourage cross-collaborations between and among scholars in advancing new knowledge to benefit society. Specifically, the rapid development of

information and communication technology (ICT) has pushed the boundaries of many aspects of marketing to great extents, including understanding online consumer behaviour, analysing Big Data, creating market disruptions, etc.

The past six years in review

Our last special issue in 2010 identified a number of emerging issues of the twenty-first century in consumer marketing, many of which fall in the realm of digital marketing: the “Dotcom Bubble”, the emergence of auction sites, the digitalisation of goods and services and peer-to-peer (P2P) communication channels (Fortin and Uncles, 2011). The consumption landscape still operates in a fluid environment, which can be characterised as even more turbulent and disruptive than ever before.

For the past five years, the most salient change in human society has been the transformation to a topological structural society (Ballerini *et al.*, 2008). Thanks to an increasingly available access to internet via smart technologies, social communication is not limited by physical distance any longer. One’s social distance to another is determined by the social degree of relationship rather than geo-physical distance. Facebook and other social networking sites make it possible for an individual’s contribution to be immediately seen by others from far away parts of the world. In marketing, this enables more intensive P2P or customer-to-customer interactions and thus calls for market providers to reposition themselves to find new ways to engage with their customers. The classical asymmetric (heavily unbalanced in fact) business-to-customer communication approach, or even the triangle company-customer-customer structure cannot survive under current marketing circumstances. As such, we have witnessed

several attempts from academia and practice to define the best practice in marketing within the new information age, including marketing communication strategies (Bruhn and Schnebelen, 2017), business ICT adoption (Dahnil *et al.*, 2014; Limbu *et al.*, 2014), social consumer behaviour (Goh *et al.*, 2013; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014) and Big Data analysis (Tirunillai and Tellis, 2014). Specifically, in some regions such as China, various levels of regional governments have begun to integrate multiple communication platforms, with the great ambition of creating “smart cities” (Zhou and Wang, 2014).

On the other hand, ICT development and the availability of high-speed internet enables consumers to think and act in a different way. First, consumers are changing their modes of communication via instant messaging and visually based smartphone apps such as Instagram. Emerging tools such as emoji are adopted to convey emotional responses in the virtual world. Second, consumers are demanding more involvement in value co-creation, and thus customer engagement and empowerment becomes extremely important in commercial sustainability (Acar and Puntoni, 2016; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). This change in the market and the power of digital capabilities further enables the rise of a sharing economy business model (Zervas *et al.*, 2014), and a number of businesses rapidly captured a significant share of traditional markets such as hospitality with Airbnb.com (Ert *et al.*, 2016), transportation with Uber.com (Cannon and Summers, 2014) and financing with crowdsourcing sites such as Kickstarter.com (Roth *et al.*, 2013).

In Figure 1, we conceptually illustrate the evolving relationship between the supply and demand sides in the current marketing environment. Research that attempts to better

understand consumers in the digital age helps to develop better marketing communication solutions. In turn, research focusing on understanding the demand side feeds into our strategic assessment of marketing strategies and actions in practice. In this special issue, we have a range of contributions that fit on many perspectives of this framework.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

Contributions

In our first article, “Does the Crowdfunding Platform Matter? Risks of Negative Attitudes in Two-Sided Markets”, Lacan and Desmet examine how crowdfunding can become an increasingly popular means to raise funds and donations using an online platform. Their contribution attempts to gauge the effectiveness of this new intermediary on contributors’ willingness to participate in crowdfunding projects. An online survey measures the relative effect of contributors’ attitudes towards the crowdfunding platform on two key behaviours: willingness to share word-of-mouth (WOM) and willingness to participate in a project. Results indicate that attitudes towards a crowdfunding platform moderate contributors’ willingness to participate due to several risk factors that affect the platform’s perceived usefulness and ease of use. These factors have negative influences on attitude towards the platform, which reduces support for the project. This study is one of the very few to appear in this emerging area of research and advances the marketing and crowdfunding literature by highlighting the potential dark side of a platform that functions as an intermediary in a two-sided market.

In “Social Media Sentiment Analysis: Lexicon Versus Machine Learning”, Dhaoui, Webster and Tan suggest that with the soaring volumes of brand-related social media conversations, digital marketers have extensive opportunities to track and analyse consumers’ feelings and opinions about brands, products or services embedded within consumer-generated content. These “Big Data” opportunities render manual approaches to sentiment analysis impractical and raise the need to develop automated tools to analyse consumer sentiment expressed in text format. A sample of 850 consumer comments from 83 Facebook brand pages are used to test and compare lexicon-based and machine learning approaches to sentiment analysis. Results appear to suggest that two approaches are similar in accuracy, both achieving higher accuracy when classifying positive sentiment than negative sentiment. This study provides innovative insight into the application and use of two sentiment analysis approaches.

With “The Effects of Smileys on Receivers’ Emotions”, authors Lohmann, Pyka and Zanger enter the fascinating virtual world of emotions and how they can be conveyed in a limited electronic environment. Little is known about the effects of smileys on the receivers’ emotions and the interaction between the communication partners. An impressive sample size consisting of 1,745 females was obtained through an online experiment applying two scenarios using either a positive or a negative smiley. Findings support the assumption that emotions expressed by smileys affect receivers’ emotions through the process of emotional contagion. Findings contribute to current research on computer-mediated communication by offering a deeper understanding of the impacts of smileys on interactions. In that way, the present study underlines the suitability of smileys to stimulate emotional contagion in what can be described as a “cueless” environment.

Powell, Camilleri, Dobele and Stavros with “Developing a Scale for the Perceived Social Benefits of Sharing” attempt to create a brief scale to measure perceived social benefit that would be appropriate for use in future research aiming to explore the role of this variable in determining WOM behaviour. WOM is becoming an increasingly powerful tool in the communication toolbox when it is enhanced by the use of digital platforms. This paper used two studies: Study 1 was concerned with the development of the perceived social benefit of sharing scale (PSBSS), including the construction of preliminary items and the reliability and concurrent validity of the final scale. Study 2 involved an investigation of the concurrent validity of the PSBSS in relation to the likelihood to share. The PSBSS can be used as an instrument to examine the role of perceived social benefit, including how the interaction between perceived social risk and benefit determines where, when and with whom people will likely share WOM.

Using a sample of users on *Twitter*, a medium gaining much attention in recent times, Kollat and Farache provides some insights about the use of symmetric vs asymmetric corporate social responsibility (CSR) messages in “Achieving Consumer Trust on Twitter via CSR Communication”. The paper evaluates how consumers react to different CSR communication approaches on social media, specifically on Twitter. Their main finding is that an asymmetric communication approach performs generally better than a symmetric communication approach. However, consumers’ involvement and their own personal information processing mechanisms also play a significant role when evaluating the trustworthiness of corporations.

Finally, in “Tweets for Tots: Using Twitter to Promote a Charity and its Supporters”, Soboleva, Burton, Daellenbach and Basil examine tweets sent by a large US-based charitable organisation (Toys for Tots [“T4T”]) across two Christmas periods. All tweets that mentioned or retweeted T4T’s corporate partners were analysed. Findings show surprisingly limited mentions of partners by T4T, with many never mentioned, and markedly fewer mentions of partners in the second period. Coupled with other research, the results show the need for this and other NPOs to more effectively use Twitter to reinforce partnerships with corporate partners. The study contributes to the literature on the effectiveness of social media under certain conditions and underscores the need for further research in this area.

Selection and review process

The original call for papers of the 2016 ANZMAC Annual Conference “Marketing in a Post-Disciplinary Era” resulted in the submission of over 400 competitive papers from 28 countries, and 301 were accepted for presentation. A large number of high quality submissions were received and with a rejection rate of 25 per cent, the calibre of papers presented at the conference was very high. All of the papers were subjected to a double-blind refereeing process including at least two anonymous reviewers. We gratefully acknowledge the work of 32 track chairs across 16 tracks and over 450 reviewers who contributed their time and experience to this process.

For this special issue of *JCM*, the guest editors invited a selection of papers for further development, review and resubmission. A total of six papers were retained from the electronic

marketing track, including the Lohmann, Pyka and Zanger article recognised as the Best Paper of the Track at the conference awards ceremony.

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Figures

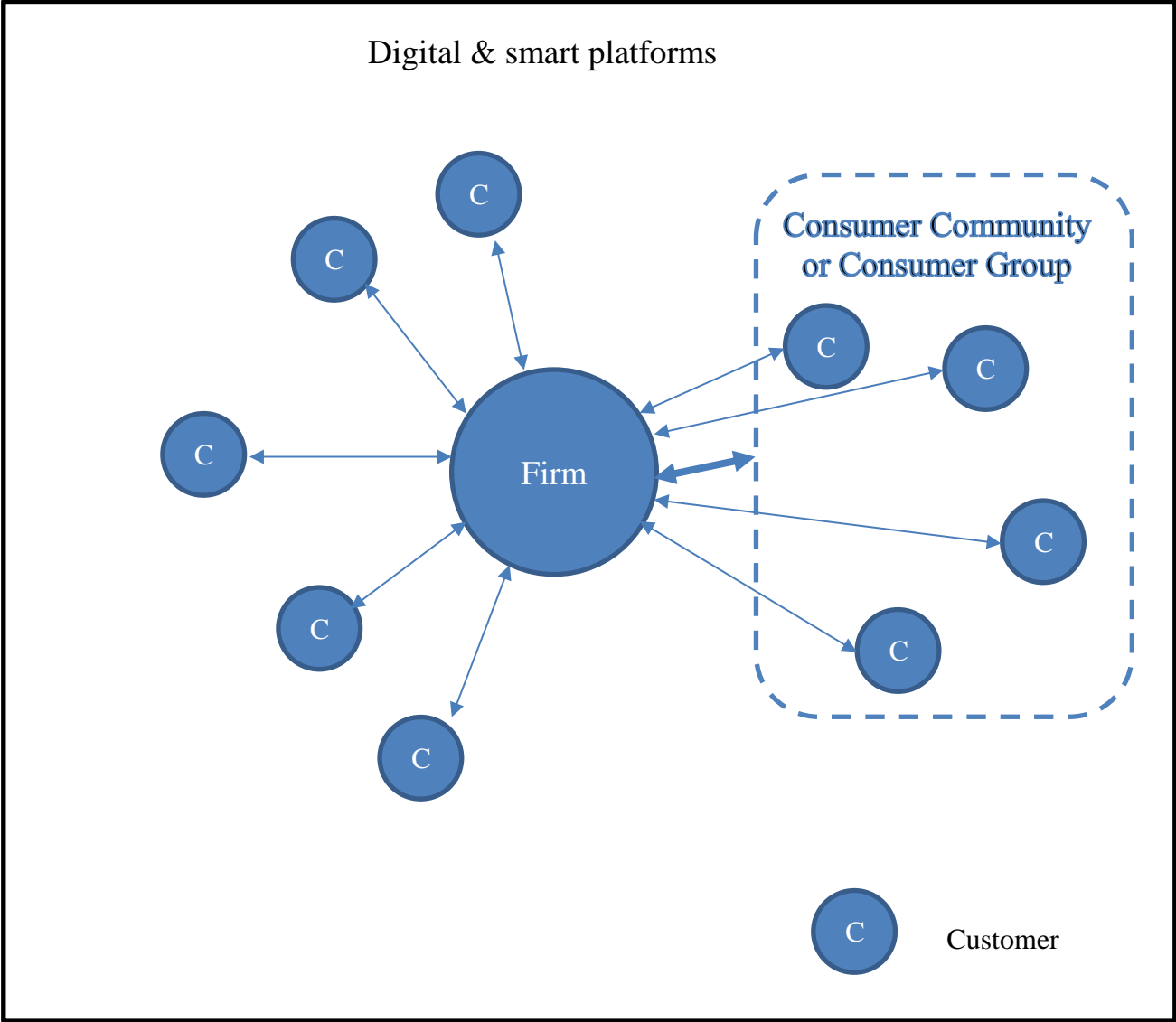


Figure 1. Relationship between supply and demand in the current digital age