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HOW DIGITAL MARKETING ADDS VALUE TO CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Hubspot Case – Software and services company

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ABSTRACT

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In the age of digitalization, information consumption on digital channels becomes more commonest than ever. This is an appealing opportunity for any brand to gain better insight into their customers and the way they experience with the brand. In fact, the concept "customer experience" creates a bombard on the realm of marketing and becomes one of the leading trends, which has a profound impact on the growth of a business.

Thus, the purpose of the thesis is to identify the influences of digital marketing on creating an excellent customer experience in Finland. A case study of Hubspot company will be demonstrated to clarify the paper's perspective. Simultaneously, the author also conducts empirical research in the form of a questionnaire to interview users about their sense of experience on multiple digital platforms.

The findings displayed the intimate correlation between the successful digital marketing strategy and exceptional customer experience. It also has a considerate contribution to the change of businesses' perspectives about the roles of CX in the success of marketing strategy. A business will possess enormous benefits when utilizing the CX notion such as improving customer satisfaction. The thesis also offers several useful future trend anticipation, which any brand can adopt to maximize the effectiveness of CX strategies according to circumstances. Ultimately, the outcomes of the thesis contribute not only to better marketing strategy but also to the future research of the digital marketing area.

Keywords Customer experience, digital marketing, future trends, Hubspot

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The business world in today's world is undergoing an unprecedented transformation in the digital era, as technology infiltrates every facet of our lives. Digitalization enables customers to develop expertise in a wide range of areas. Due to this shift, the higher expectations lead to increasing regard for the brand that one makes a business with. Hence, most enterprises are aware of the transition and strive to improve their marketing tactics to meet the demanding expectations of today's customers. The use of digital marketing is an effective tool for reducing the distance between the brand and its audience. Digital platforms facilitate the brand to build a strong connection with digital immigrants at various touchpoints of the customer journey for an increase in value. A growing number of CRM and marketing software is also being adopted to create more relevant and exquisite content for its online visitors. With digital marketing, marketing strategists are no longer heavily dependent on traditional approaches to capture customer attention.

Furthermore, the ever-increasing market competition contributes to the accelerating role of the customer in relation to the brand, which marked an extraordinary change in positions in the corporate world. This conveys the idea that business decisions and strategies are now driven by the needs of customers. Customer experience will be a crucial part of the company's customer strategy in order to achieve its business objectives.

In light of these facts, it is convincing that digital marketing and the customer experience have a correlation. Forrester states, "In the age of the customer, consumers have more information, more choices, more access, and more power. But they don't have more time." Is it true that digitalization is the shortcut to increase interaction and satisfy customer expectations these days? Therefore, the thesis is to illumine the roles of digital marketing in enhancing customer experience under the digital landscape, and what businesses can do to deliver exceptional customer experience. Simultaneously, the result of the study can devote to future marketing research and its practices.

Due to the wide scope of the study, the thesis may primarily concentrate on the relevant theories in terms of the topic and deliver the ultimate outcome that will be investigated based on the quantitative methods. In other words, the thesis imposed several restrictions, such as limiting the sample size and making the duration of the research short.

1.2 Research problems and the structure of research

As stated above, due to the fluctuation under the impact of the digitalized process as well as the new perspective of customer experience in the current consuming context, the thesis is conducted to examine the relationship of online marketing and customer experience to cater to the utmost purpose of improving customer satisfaction. The research question is how digital marketing adds value to the customer experience on every touch point. There are five sub-questions formulated to clarify the research objectives in terms of the influences of e-marketing on enhancing user experience.

- How does the use of digital marketing influence customer experience from the employers' viewpoint?
- How does the implementation of the Hubspot company case and the empirical research illumine the correlation of digital marketing and CX perspective?
- What are the prospective benefits to implement online marketing on building a CX strategy?
- What are the potentials and challenges when executing digital marketing tools to leverage user experience?
- What are digital marketing trends that could contribute to excellent CX?

The author tailors a research structure (figure 1) reflecting on the thesis objectives to establish a proactive approach for addressing the research problem. This structure also consolidates the consistency of the research. The thesis map is formulated into three primary sections. The first chapter will begin with the fundamentals of digital marketing (DM) and customer experience (CX) terminologies. The paper will provide several correlated theories explored throughout a different timeline for readers to have an objective point of view about these perceptions. The next section introduces the case company and the empirical research combining methodology to explain the implementation of the thesis. The last part of the paper will analyze the correlation between digital marketing and the customer experience in practices containing the benefits, potential and challenges, digital marketing trends to aim for creating customer experience excellence (CEE) on the user journey. The findings will answer the thesis problem

of whether digital marketing has a profound impact on superior customer experience in the realm of digitation.

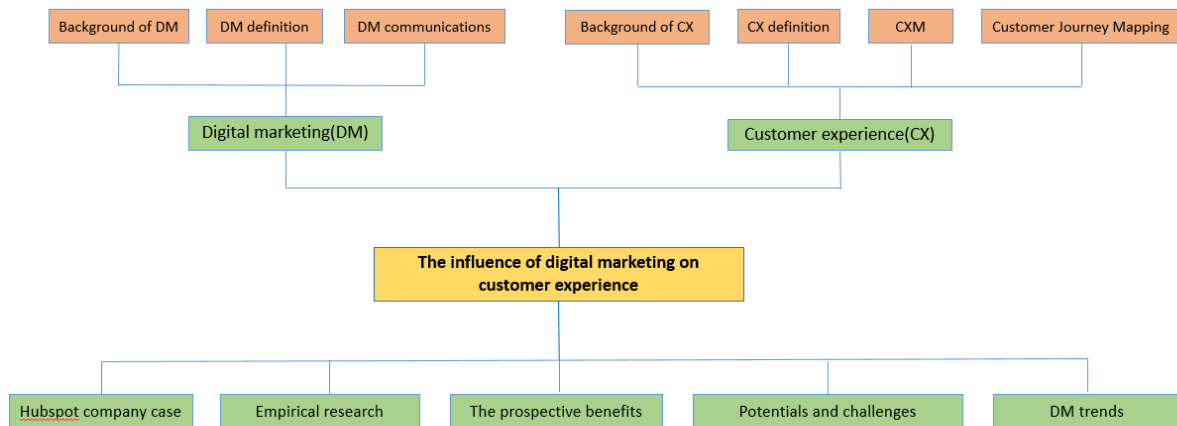


Figure 1. The structure of the thesis

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Digital marketing

2.1.1 Businesses in the era of Digital Marketing 4.0

The concept of digital marketing 4.0 has become familiar to Internet users in general, as well as technophiles in particular, as it has a profound impact on our modern lives, interactions, and businesses. As opposed to the past, when people had to travel to the shops and spend a significant amount of time searching for what they needed. Presently, customers can buy everything from food to clothes just by clicking a few buttons, as digital technology has changed the way people do shopping. Gigantti - an electronic goods retailer in Finland that operates a sophisticated website that continuously updates all product information that buyers might want to research. Simultaneously the website also provides 24/7 chatbots and video calls to support buyers in need of consulting help and allows customers to order their desired products without coming into the store.

In fact, the constant contact between sellers and buyers on digital platforms has generated significant value and altered the way of operating a business. As business owners and marketers, it is critical to shift perceptions about the role of digital marketing in the workplace, stay current on technological advancements, and be able to combine these factors to build appropriate marketing strategies for customers who want an improved shopping experience. As a result, it is beneficial for individuals who are interested in becoming a future trader or buyer to gain a deeper insight into the notion of Digital Marketing 4.0, which might be useful for creating or enjoying the shopping process in the digital age. In the book *Marketing 4.0: Moving from Traditional to Digital*, Kotler Philip and his associates stated that:

“Marketing 4.0 is a marketing approach that combines online and offline interaction between companies and customers. In the digital economy, digital interaction alone is not sufficient. In fact, in an increasingly online world, offline touch represents a strong differentiation. Marketing 4.0 also blends style with substance. While it is imperative for brands to be more flexible and adaptive due to rapid technological trends, their authentic characters are more important than ever.”

Marketers used to embrace the traditional way of broadcasting a marketing message to a set of viewers with similar demographics via television, radio, newspapers, brochures, billboards, and other means, they risk alienating their target audience. Marketing 4.0 has made it easier to

design inventive marketing tactics for chasing primarily potential clients by evaluating, assessing, and gathering "Big Data," thanks to cutting-edge technology such as Artificial Intelligence, Cloud computing, and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software.

Nevertheless, to effectively target consumer audiences through mass media, advertisers should integrate both traditional and digital approaches so as to reach more prospects. Statista Research reports that internet users spend 145 minutes each day online, including time spent shopping, making social networks, and reading news. As a result, firms may be able to air 30-second commercials on television as clients seek information about relevant products on search engines at the same time. Thus, firms may be able to run 30-second ads on television while clients use search engines to locate relevant product information concurrently. Adding online and offline interactions can increase awareness for products like 5 To Go, a coffee brand in Romania that had the slogan "more coffee, less bucks" on their billboards integrated with the hashtag #weareneighborsnow" and "#romanianbrands" on Instagram in the opening day. By advertising on the street in Bucharest with the creative message "more coffee, less bucks" it will raise the attention and curiosity of coffee lovers to search for more about the presence of the local brand on digital media.

In short, "the technology convergence will ultimately lead to the convergence between digital marketing and traditional marketing" (Kotler, 2017). It indicates the fact that the integration between tradition and digitalization will be the clever step to be able to achieve marketing objectives.

2.1.2 Digital marketing definition

Within this chapter, we will discuss digital marketing definitions and explain the differences between digital marketing and traditional marketing from a conceptual standpoint and a practical standpoint.

Whilst marketing is "the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential" (Kotler, 2012), then "digital marketing refers to the use of digital technology platforms, combined with traditional media, to achieve marketing objectives. Digital marketing involves

using paid, owned and earned digital media channels and using other technologies, such as databases for customer relationship management (e-CRM)” (Chaffey, Dave, and Fiona, 2015).

In other words, “digital marketing is much more than selling a product, it has come to encompass engagement with our customers across many types of electronic channels” (Debra, 2020). The statement demonstrates the distinction between the roles of marketing in traditional and digital ways. Historically, marketing and sales are integrated terms because sales man plays a significant role in the marketing process since their responsibility lies in advertising and selling products. As a result, marketing intermingles with the sales process, so its role is the same as "selling a product".

Modern digitalization has changed how marketing works and has shifted the role of marketing appropriately. Besides marketing a product, another function of digital marketing , it also serves to connect brands with their audiences and customers with each other with a view to increasing engagement, creating a stronger bond between brands and customers more than just a seller-customer relationship.



Figure 2. The interchanging roles of traditional and digital marketing

Figure 2 displays the interchanging roles of traditional marketing and digital marketing in developing a comprehensive marketing plan on the customer path. While the former focuses on the conventional marketing approach involving strategic segmentation & targeting, brand

positioning & differentiation, tactical marketing mix, and value-creating services & processes, the latter emphasizes the connected community methods including customer community and care, brand clarification of character & codification, and connected marketing mix. Neither of their functions overlaps the other and their targets are well- defined. “Digital marketing is not meant to replace traditional marketing. Digital marketing and traditional marketing are meant to coexist in Marketing 4.0 with the ultimate goal of winning customer advocacy.” (Kartajaya, Hermawan, et al, 2016).

In conclusion, “digital marketing is not an additional way of doing marketing – it is, in many respects, an entirely new way of doing marketing. As such, it will and should leave a lasting impression on a retailer’s marketing organization. Digital marketing affects structures, roles, processes, talent, and the corporate culture.”(Perrey, Jesko, and Dennis, 2013). Online marketing has undeniably contributed to the growth of businesses and expanded customer bases, and the "chemistry" between digital and traditional marketing strategies can result in better marketing campaign performance.

2.1.3 Digital marketing communications

Throughout this section, thesis will explore the functionalities of digital marketing by discussing how digital marketing communications can affect the interactions between brands and their audiences.

Communication is an essential key in delivering the message and forming the connection between the brand and customers. Previously, companies used traditional media such as TV, billboards, and printed advertisements to promote their products, but with the arrival of the Internet, everything has changed. Online access facilitates marketing communications to become diverse and digitalized. Businesses nowadays can use various “different digital technology platforms including the Internet, web, mobile phone, interactive TV, IPTV and digital signage” (Chaffey, Dave, and Fiona, 2015) to deliver a marketing message to the wider consumer scope. In fact, more and more mutual communities or social forums are established for buyers or users to share information or express opinions about their experiences when using the product or service. It greatly contributes to the brand image. One negative message could catch fire which the brand could spend years or longer to extinguish.

Marketing can reach target customers through multiple digital channels on the market. Each channel caters to different segments of consumers. According to Jekko and Dennis (2013), “all apparent intents and purposes, it defines the category”. Facebook and LinkedIn are primarily used for maintaining personal and business connections; Instagram and Pinterest are the most widely used image sharing platforms. A business can decide which digital marketing tools to use for customer communication based on the marketing objectives and segmentations of their customers. A brand can possess multiple social networking channels to increase the brand cognition and engaging possibility with social users. Using digital communication channels gives you access to more prospective buyers since 4.57 million people are on some type of social media, 64% of online shoppers say a video on social media made their decision, and 86% of women look at social media before making a purchase, according to Statista research.

Due to the range of digital marketing tools available today and their diverse practical uses, Chaffey and Smith (2008) categorize media channels into six types that marketing strategists should take into consideration when developing marketing plans or campaigns.

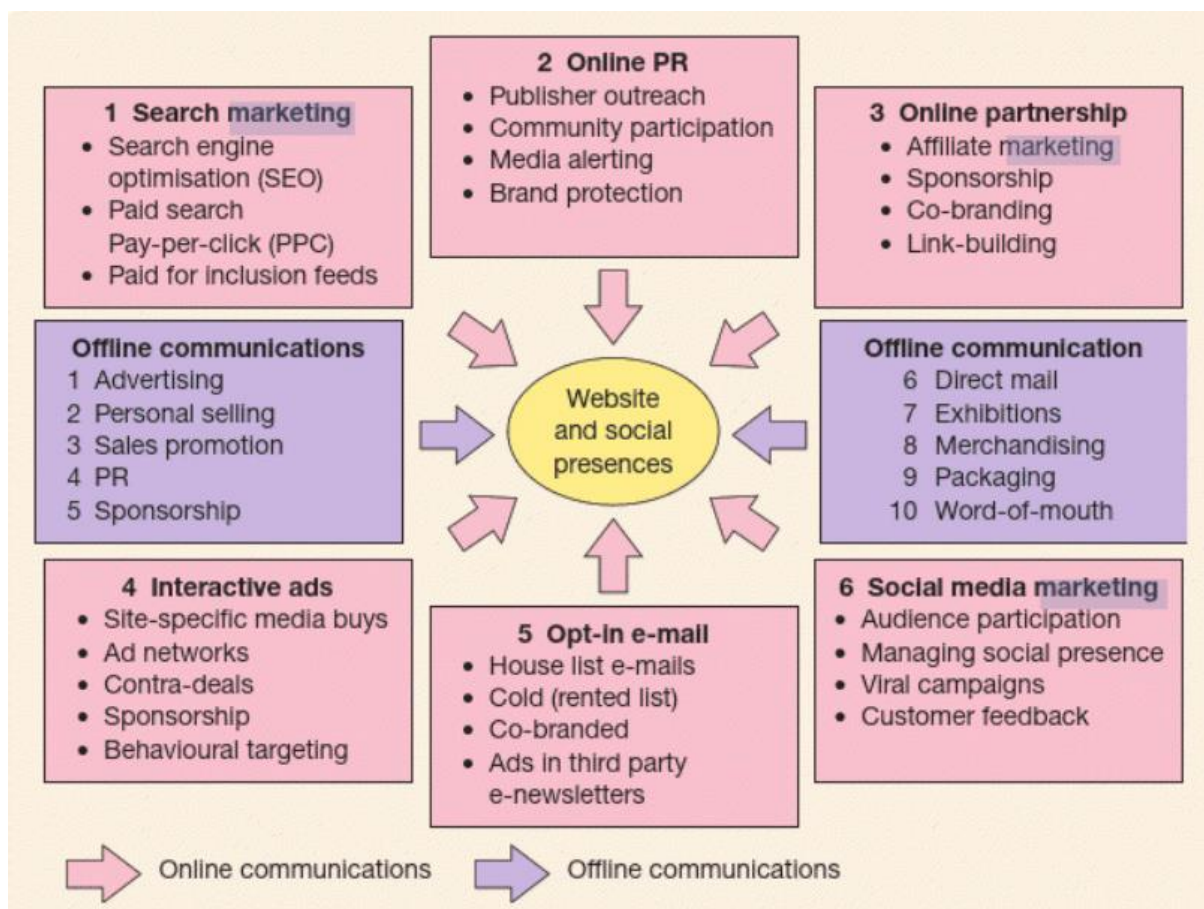


Figure 3. Six categories of e-communications tools or media channels (Chaffey and Smith, 2008)

Search engine marketing (SEM): Google is the largest search engine platform on the planet achieving 75,000 searches per second (Google Search Statistics), ahead of Bing, Yahoo, and Microsoft Edge. When entering a keyword, the search engine will provide a list of websites divided into advertising and organic searches.

When it comes to organic search, Hubspot estimates that 64 percent of marketers actively invest in Search Engine Organization (SEO). Optimizing the keyword-related content will result in organic search, which will contribute to the ranking of the website higher on the search engine. By developing an effective SEO strategy, the website can obtain a sustainable lead, help to deliver marketing messages, and create higher engagement.

On the other hand, pay-per-click (PPC) ad is an advertisement placed on the top of a search engine, catching the attention of visitors at first glance. A business will pay for each time users clicking on their ads. In the early stages of your business, pay-per-click (PPC) is a good option to target more customers. In the long run, it is recommended to drive organic search on valuable content, which could increase the trust of online users when visiting a site.

Online PR: Online public relation' refers to the use of social networks, blogs, podcasts and websites to deliver marketing messages closer to the target audience.

Online partnership: Online partnership refers to the mutually beneficial collaboration between brands or brands and intermediaries in order to promote and maintain online services on third-party websites or social platforms with the purpose of increasing the trustworthiness of the website and conversion rate from audiences. There are various types of online partnerships encompassing affiliate marketing, sponsorship, co-branding, and link-building.

Interactive ads or "display advertising" is graphic advertising on Internet websites, apps or social media through banners or other advertising formats made of text, images, flash, video, and audio. The main purpose of display advertising is to deliver general advertisements and brand messages to site visitors" (Wikipedia).

Opt-in e-mail: is a popular email marketing approach where website online users invited to subscribe to an e-newsletter. With this low-cost marketing method, a brand can establish a

long-lasting relationship with clients by offering valuable information and regular contact with them.

Social media marketing: refers to marketing content on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, and others. Companies can engage more active users on networking platforms by creating appealing content or topics, particularly relating to societal trends. Likes, shares, reposts, retweets, and other actions increase brand awareness and aid in buying decisions.

Figure 4 demonstrates the diversity of social media universe. There are 10 different purposes in the ecosystem, each with their own function and exemplary social media channels. For instance, the aim of social networks is to maintain contact through personal and business profiles on prominent platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Google+. These days, the emergence of several social channels also obtains a considerable amount of followers, namely Instagram, Snapchat, Mind, and Vero.

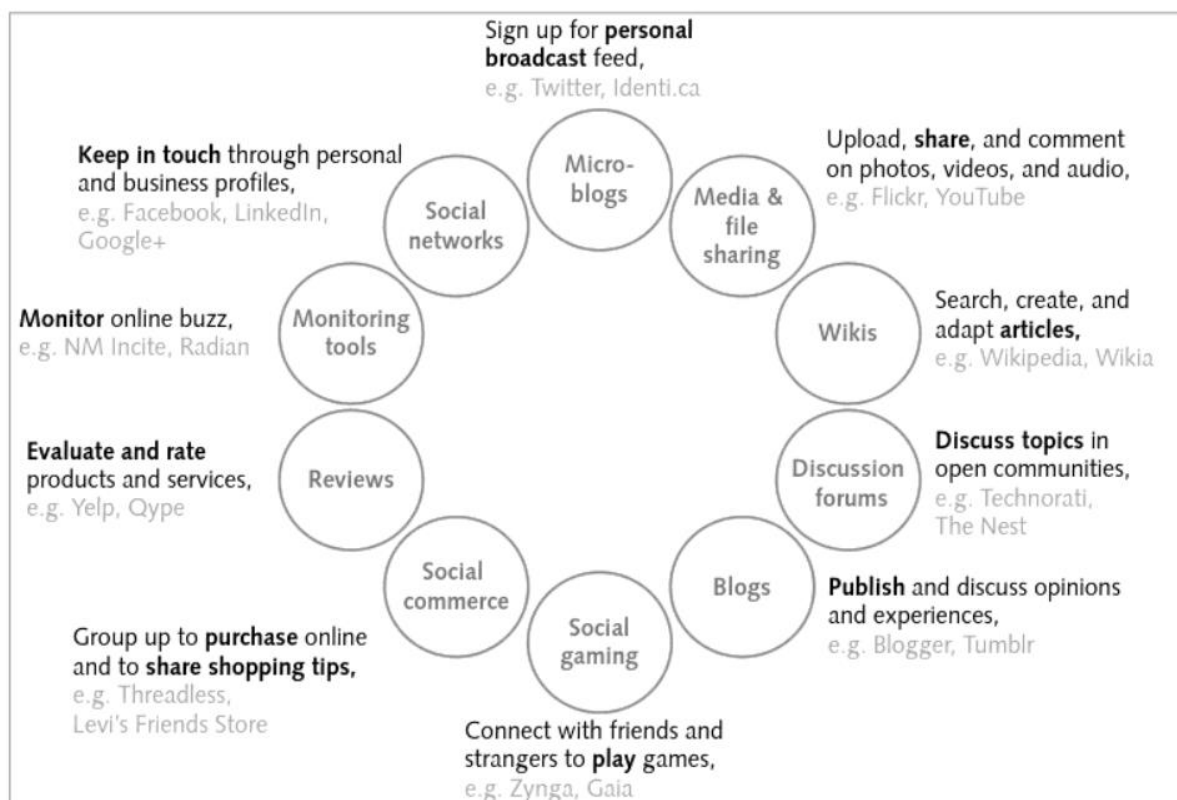


Figure 4. Social media universe Source: Jekko and Dennis (2013)

Digital marketing communications offers multiple effective tools for marketers and customers to increase communication and interactivity across diverse digital platforms. By understanding

online consumer habits and preferences, businesses can deliver more engaging contents to the right audiences on the right marketing channels. Understanding the function of each online communication tool, a brand enables to customize the marketing strategies properly in accordance with the tastes and needs of customers.

2.2 Customer Experience

2.2.1 The arrival of Customer Experience (CX)

When it comes to the prosperity of a business, it can be indispensable the profound contribution of customers. In addition to being buyers, customers are supporters, contributors, motivators, and potential brand ambassadors who can bring profit and vitality to a business.

Over the past decades, the key indicators of measuring the success of an organization have been profits and revenues, followed by the number of employee, the size, the diversity of products, the large volume of employees and other flashy assets that can be displayable. As of today, the definition of success is simply the level of customer satisfaction. Wilburn, Morris (2006) cited “one of the fundamental changes in business in America over the past three decades has been a shift away from trying to acquire as many customers as possible toward retaining and then obtaining as much business as possible from the loyal customer”. Higher customer satisfaction will increase the likelihood that they will reorder products from a company. Statistics from PwC reported that consumers will pay a 16% price premium for great customer experience or 48% of consumers have left a website without purchasing because they felt it was poorly curated for them (Accent). The main reasons for explaining this modification are variations in the market and demands from consumers. When this level of living was still low, people used to consume different products to meet their living needs. At that time, the product – centric marketing could be the primary strategy to drive businesses forward, the firm concentrates on quantities, “trying to acquire as many customers as possible” Wilburn, Morris (2006), and services are provided as an addition to cater to selling target.

Another factor that had driven the change of the market is the emergence of more sustainable sources coming from both domestic and foreign areas, which leverage the competition and variety of the trading market already highly challenging. With a wide range of options available

and better living conditions, clients today are more picky and fastidious when it comes to choosing the brand they want to make a business with. “In a world where products and services are becoming more and more commoditized, customer experience is the only true differentiator” (Annette Franz). As a result, enterprises are aware of this shift and pre-prepare themselves by looking for a better marketing strategy that can assist them to “retaining and then obtaining as much business as possible from the loyal customer”. From product-centric in Marketing 1.0 to consumer-centric in Marketing 2.0 to value-driven concept in Marketing 3.0, customer experience can be determined as the worth- considering marketing tactic in the Marketing 4.0 landscape.



Figure 5. Marketing and the customer experience Source: Salesforce

From 2018 to 2020, Salesforce reported the increasing number of how customer experience leads the marketing trend and becomes the powerful strategy across organizations, which be utilized by marketers to improve experience of customers on every touch point. The concept of CX (customer experience) spreads stronger than ever thanks to the digitalization process, shoppers currently expect the perfect experience across every single channel, from traditional to digital. For the business, the question is no longer "should we implement customer experience concepts into our business model" but "how to implement customer experience concepts into our business model strategically and effectively" to be able to adapt to the fast-paced progress of the inter-changing market.

2.2.2 What is the Customer Experience

As mentioned above, a strong customer experience is the key to a disruptive business model that can assist in creating extraordinary experiences for visitors on the customer journey, so the business can be able to increase customer engagement and conversion rates.

When it comes to the concept of customer experience, there are multiple interpretations given to illuminate the meaning and value of CX in the process of winning the hearts of customers. Particularly, “a customer experience is an interaction between an organization and a customer. It is a blend of an organization’s physical performance, the senses stimulated and emotions evoked, each intuitively measured against customer experience expectations across all moments of contact” (Shaw & Ivens 2002, 6).

“Customer experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company” (Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

“Customer experience is the sum of those meetings, visions and feelings that customer forms from company’s operations” (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 11).

In essence, these are simple and transparent exposition of the formation of customer experience. Cassie McInnes described CX as “an opportunity to make the world a better place. It is not just about making money, it is about humanity”. This statement gives me a chance to view CX as more than just a marketing tool. It is a manner to communicate meaningful value from the business to the customer and, from customers to customers, the notion of humanity spreads out about “how incredible your business is” (Shep Hyken) and how extraordinary experiences that customer has earned from you.

Besides, customer experience and customer service are likely similar concepts, however, but their definitions are different, as are their functions. If the customer service refers to a customer-facing team that assists customers before and after they purchase the product/service, they can provide the support them with delivery, installation, and any issues they might encounter during the purchasing process. Then, the customer experience refers to the entire customer journey that occurs the interaction between customers and the business on every touchpoint, involved in the customer service with the ultimate purpose to deliver a better customer experience.

In short, the way the brand perceives the customer experience will affect the level of customer engagement. The higher the customer-centric mindset is prioritized, the higher achievement of consumer's trust and advocacy for the business. Therefore, investing in the improvement of the CX strategies is mandatory. It is not only about the visual website, higher ranking in the search engines, promotions or sales, but that is a story of understanding the demand and expectations of buyers, what they look for when making a purchase, and what you can offer to them that differentiates yourself on the competitive market. Once the business can map out the path of their own, not chasing after rivals' waves, they will especially position themselves in customers' hearts as Jeff Scotts stated “if you're competitor-focused, you have to wait until there is a competitor doing something. Being customer-focused allows you to be more pioneering. Focusing on the customer makes a company more resilient.”

A good customer experience gives you a chance to encounter more customers and a great customer experience gives you a chance to obtain more loyal customer. “If you do build a great experience, customers tell each other about that. Word of mouth is very powerful” (Jeff Scotts). Define who you are as well as your strengths and weaknesses will contribute to executing the right CX strategies for the right target audiences.

2.2.3 Customer Experience Management (CEM – CRM)

Establishing a remarkable customer experience becomes the major part of the marketing strategies among various companies, any marketing campaigns, products and services aim for customer-centric perspectives. Heretofore, only the service and sales departments were responsible for the customer-facing tasks, worked towards customer satisfaction; now, in order to achieve the excellent CX, it is mandatory for every department and companies staffs to step into customers' shoes to understand and be able to provide the optimal customer-oriented solutions. That explained how Amazon can able to deliver one-day shipping in practice. As understanding that buyers have an increasing expectation for the delivery speed, Amazon launched the new campaign Prime One-day moving from two-day to one-day shipping, online shoppers can receive your parcels on the same day with their orders. That is visual evidence of how a customer-centric mindset permeates the entire organization. To practice the seem-to-be-unrealistic task, the factory has 250,000 warehouse employees and 100,000 robots that work continuously, in addition to Amazon teams researching the market, the customer, the products in order to identify price matches, the customer purchasing journey and more. Accordingly, the

products can be collected at the nearest warehouse, awaiting the purchase decision, and delivered to a customer in one day.

Apart from capturing the right expectations of online purchasers, Amazon also utilizes cutting-edge technologies that contribute to the collection of the real-time flow of data. It results in providing deeper insights about customer behaviors and preferences to serves the utmost purpose of successful delivery of Prime one-day shipping approach. This process is known as Customer Experience Management (CXM or CEM), in other words, which is “the collection of processes a company uses to track, oversee and organize every interaction between a customer and the organization throughout the customer lifecycle”(Don Fluckinger).

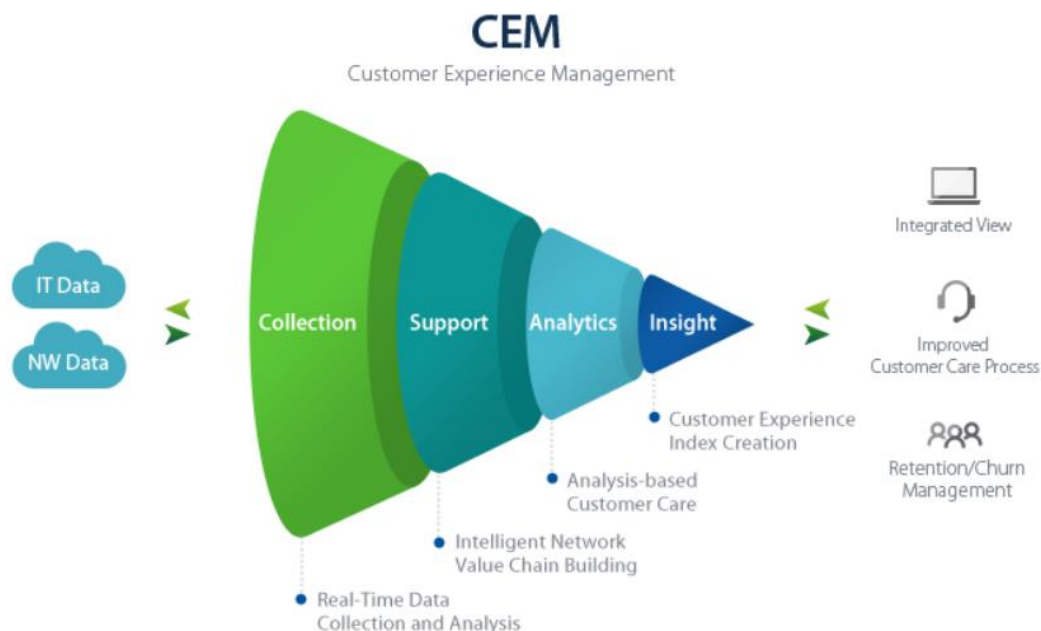


Figure 6. Customer Experience Management Source: BrandVietnam

Figure 6 displayed the pyramid Of the CMX function working as the two-way transmission line. User data will experience four stages encompassing collection, support, analytics, and insight. The business will utilize the insight for improved customer care and process as well as churn management. The process will be monitored for continuous improvement in order to support customer experience management.

The integration of CXM into the marketing strategies aims for creating the ease of experiences across multiple touch points. Following that the experiences need to be consistent across all communication channels through which audiences may interact with the brand directly and indirectly. Persistence could maintain the stability in experiences and also increase the brand recognition for the business, as customers may comprehend what they can expect from the brand. From the website data to the shop decor, products to the marketing campaigns, or information on multiple social media channels, H&M brand clearly distinguishes itself as a clothing store where customers can purchase fast-fashion clothes at an affordable price. Besides that, customer experience strategies could enhance the personalization of the customer lifecycle in various ways. Individualization could boost to deliver the relevant contents, offer more personalized value for the audience which can keep the interest and increase the customer engagement.

Moreover, CXM also is easily confused with the CRM concept as they share similar functionalities, which could prove to be troublesome whenever a business adopts a new marketing strategy. In fact, these serve the same purpose is to beautifulize the customer relationship. Whereas CRM (customer relationship management) acts more like a tool where the company can store customer and prospect contact information, establish the marketing and sale strategies to target audiences, CXM focuses on constructing the customer-oriented approaches with the use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and CRM real-time data to provide the remarkable experience for customers. In short, “CRM shows what a customer looks like to the company, and CEM defines what a company looks like to the customer”(Don Fluckinger).

The implementation of CXM facilitates businesses to analyze and enhance the interaction between customers and brands. A company can consider using CRM software including Hubspot, Salesforce, Walkme, and more, in order to make their marketing strategies more relevant and value-added. Utilizing CXM strategies will help a brand achieve stronger relationships with audiences and maintain long-term loyalty by following three techniques:

Understanding and Segmenting Customers: It is an essential step for a company to segment their customers relied on common characteristics (from demographics and psychographics) to enable to establish an appropriate marketing strategy. Catering to the right customers with the right approach will yield maximum client engagement.

Personalizing Experience and Creating Emotional Connection: Statistic from Epsilon estimates that 80% of consumers are more likely to purchase when brands offer experiences personalized to them. Offering a personalized experience boosts satisfaction higher than ever. It makes consumers feel more personal and human when the brand customizes the content depending on their interests and preferences. In contrast, 48% of consumers have left a website without purchasing because they felt it was poorly curated for them. (Accenture). Currently, people buy things because they like them rather than because they need them. Thus, the emotional connection is vital to increase customer engagement. Users receiving the emotional connection tend to be loyal and have higher retention.

Actualizing Customer Feedback: Capturing customer feedback is the form of co-creation, it empowers customers to participate in the brand development. By sharing the feelings and perspectives, customers also contribute the value and innovations for businesses to become greater. As a customer, they also feel respectful and worthy when their voice can be listened and taken in practice. Moreover, customers' opinions, nowadays, not only are observed by the brand but also by other communities where they share the same interest. The way in which a company responds will indicate its personality and priority toward customers and prospects, as well as influence the retention and conversion rate.

Customer experience management is a critical component of delivering an excellent customer experience. Understanding and utilizing CXM strategies and software will propel a business further on the path of pursuing customers' hearts. Consistent and personalized experiences will increase customer satisfaction and brand advocacy across diverse touchpoints.

2.2.4 Customer Journey Mapping

For businesses, having a holistic insight of customers' buying habits and behaviors is underpinning to design a comprehensive customer cycle that matches their preferences and expectations. Customized buying journeys are becoming more significant than ever due to the fast-paced growth of the digitalization process, which allows the customer interaction chain to become more diverse and complex than before. Creating a customer journey mapping is the first step to get to know customers better, simultaneously enables the establishment of a positive relationship with visitors. According to one definition, "a customer journey map is a framework that maps out the stages in your customers' relationship with your organization.

The map breaks each stage into steps, telling the story of your customers' experiences from their perspective, exploring their lifecycle stages, and identifying their key interactions with your organization from start to finish" (Villani, Isabella 2018, 83).

The question is that why customer journey mapping is exceedingly important these days? It is a result of the fact that the market changes caused demand changes, which required methods to be adjusted, and finally the approach itself had to be modified. In the past, a company used to dominate a market and drives consumers on their way. The sales man did lead the way shoppers understand from products, pricing, features to benefits. Upon completing the transaction, consumers can commit to a brand just by the quality of its products.

These days, with the proliferation of the internet, buyers are more well-informed, knowledgeable, and curious about the product, brand, and services before making a purchasing decision. Customers have higher expectations; they want more from brands than just transactions. By establishing emotional connections involving trust, sympathy, and caring with your audience, you will gain the edge over thousands of competing businesses. In other words, customers now buy experiences not just products, as there are plenty of options on the marketplace. CX is an exclusive differentiator that enables the brand to "personalize" itself in comparison to other marketing strategies. The more positive experience the brand creates, the higher the conversion and retention rate will earn.

Thereupon, the customer journey map also contributes to bold the color of customer personas by collecting, analyzing, estimating, and anticipating the buyer's behavior. "A buyer persona is a fictional profile typically informed by research that represents a particular target audience. Personas are a tool which can help in understanding online customer characteristics and behavior" (Dave, Fiona, 2016, 79). Afterward, the company is able to design an appropriate marketing campaign with buyers' preferred touchpoints to optimize client experience and purchase probability. There is no standard framework for mapping the buyer journey. The map could differ from business to business. It depends on your target groups and marketing objectives, however, it should be consistent for your audiences to keep on track and have a seamless, low-effort experience. . The map could differ from business to business. It depends on your target groups and marketing objectives, however, it should be consistent for your audiences to keep on track and have a seamless, low-effort experience.

TechTarget introduced a fundamental customer journey map comprised of stages, customer actions, touchpoints, customer experience, KPIs, business goals and the team(s) involved, which provides an overall picture of the buying process.

Customer journey map






STAGE	Awareness	Consideration	Decision	Service	Loyalty
CUSTOMER ACTIONS	View online ad, see social media campaign, hear about from friends	Conduct research, research competitors, compare features and pricing	Make a purchase	Receive product/service, contact customer service, read product/service documentation	Make another purchase, share experience
TOUCHPOINTS	Traditional media, social media, word of mouth	Word of mouth, website, social media	Website, mobile app, phone	Phone, chatbot, email	Word of mouth, social media, review sites
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE	Interested, hesitant 	Curious, excited 	Excited 	Frustrated 	Satisfied, excited 
KPIs	Number of people reached	New website visitors	Conversion rate, online sales	Product reviews, customer service success rate, waiting time	Retention rate, customer satisfaction score
BUSINESS GOALS	Increase awareness, interest	Increase website visitors	Increase conversion rate, online sales	Increase customer service satisfaction, minimize wait time	Generate positive reviews, increase retention rate
TEAM(S) INVOLVED	Marketing, communications	Marketing, communications, sales	Online development, sales, marketing, customer service	Customer service, customer success	Online development, customer service, customer success

Figure 7. Customer journey mapping, source: TechTarget

Awareness: In the first stage of the buying journey, visitors become aware of your brand's existence. For the firm, it is crucial to educate customers about products and services, as well as how to help them solve their problems, by highlighting relevant resources and content. Google Ads, PPC, social media, or word-of-mouth will help you to draw the attention of customers. "In fact, 72% of buying decisions begin on Google" (Google Search Statistics). All

a brand has to do is to create an impression, which makes potential clients associate the brand with their current or future needs.

Consideration: In this second stage, prospective buyers are aware of the brand presence and their needs. Clients will narrow their interest options, and start to investigate prices, features, included services, and competitors for the products on the digital platforms. This will enable them to possess a clear picture of the current situation. If the website, word-of-mouth, social media are highly connected with customers 'pain points, they may make a further micro commitment by providing their contact, email or subscribing to e-newsletters. That is a positive signal that customers seem to be ready to make a purchase but they may need a trigger. At that time, quick email responses, social engagement, and more will be the ideal triggers. Be helpful and friendly as always.

Decision: The online shopper is ready to make an order at this stage. However, they are checking out more options to determine which will be the most advantageous deal regarding prices and services. There is a definite preference for browsing online reviews and ratings as well as social recommendations from friends and digital platforms. Spiceworks indicates that 97% of customers respond to recommendations and ratings during the buying cycle. It is vital for the firm to earn credit with positive ratings and recommendations. Besides, the user-friendly and secure experience on multiple platforms, such as mobile, apps, the website, and the phone, will give shoppers confidence when making online purchases.

Service: When a deal is successfully closed, the customer life cycle has not ended yet. This is one of the most significant stages determining whether a company's relationship with its customers will grow or not. After purchasing, there will be plenty of questions that clients may have. It is recommended to provide available touchpoints containing follow-up calls, email, chatbox, forum, so clients can stay connected and receive the prompt response from their sellers. A study shows that 75% of people expect immediate information when using their smartphone (Google Search Statistics). In addition, excellent customer service contributes to the positive experiences and perceptions of buyers towards your brand.

Loyalty: The last stage of the process of journey mapping is also the most challenging. Numerous companies work hard to increase the intention of buyers. In fact, repeat customers contribute to stable revenues and act as brand ambassadors. "71% of people recommend a product or service because they received a pleasant experience" (Convince & Convert

Consulting). It is vitally imperative for businesses to regularly keep in contact with customers. There are some useful offers like sending relevant contents or videos applying to their purchases, or offering a discount and memberships to encourage brand advocacy and retention. Adding value to their experiences along with the product is the effective way to improve CX. There is a win – win relationship between the company and its loyal customers.

Mapping out the entire customer journey allows a business to view their organization through customers' eyes. This is the only way to visualize all the essential pain points and touchpoints of customers. Every client has different wants and needs, and this can always change depending on their buying lifecycle stages. Your business will reap certain benefits from understanding the buying journey.

- *Identify gap between customer and business:* An in-depth buyer's journey map assists in identifying and filling discontinuities during the experience journey. As a result, a business can identify a shining moment in the purchasing process. Sometimes, one bright spot will illuminate the entire journey. This is also an opportunity to increase purchasing probability and customer satisfaction.
- *Deliver on the customer's intent and need:* Apart from solving the customers' pain points, the journey process also contributes to providing an on-time solution to fulfill the intent and needs of purchasers.
- *Increase the relevant content and personalized experience:* Undoubtedly, the buyer mapping could support marketers to deliver more related content and united experiences, as the process has been regularly customized relied on buyers' behavior and purchasing history.
- *Achieve the short-term and long-term marketing objectives:* Every business will define specific marketing goals depending on each circumstance. Utilizing customer journey mapping will assist the brand to meet their short-time goals such as testing new marketing channels or other marketing strategies; as well as long-term goals such as expanding brand awareness or customer lifetime value.

It is no surprise that customer journey mapping plays an essential role in the corporate world. By accommodating the valuable insight of customers, it will help businesses to improve the customer experience. Villani, Isabella (2018) states “if a business is serious about executing a customer experience strategy, it should regularly map the customer journey to ensure plans are aligned to customer expectations and not what the business thinks the customer expects”.

Nothing is better than stepping in buyers' shoes to understand, sympathize, and co- accompany them throughout the buying process to achieve the highest customer satisfaction at the end of the day. Due to the inter-changing market, it is essential for the firm to continuously update the buyer journey process. This will serve the ultimate purpose is to generate a smooth and consistent experience for audiences.

3 .CASE COMPANY

3.1 What is Hubspot

HubSpot is a leading software and services company based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, dedicated to supporting business growth. It was founded by Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah in 2005. They have currently established partnerships with more than 30,000 companies in over 90 countries. The company's products and services include marketing, sales, service, and website management products that start free and scale to meet the customers' needs at any stage of growth. In terms of marketing hub, HubSpot specializes in inbound marketing, landing pages, call-to-actions (CTAs), content management, email marketing, social media marketing, customer support, and search engine optimization (SEO).

In its mission to "help businesses grow better", HubSpot has gained a profound achievement when "96% of customer respondents agree that HubSpot has helped them meet their marketing goals, 68% felt they generated better quality leads, and 46% saw an increase in their customer satisfaction since using HubSpot.", according to HubSpot statistics.

3.2 HubSpot as a leading CX company

In addition to its primary functions as an excellent marketing platform that helps other businesses achieve their goals, HubSpot has also successfully marketed its own brand as an "unified ecosystem of software, education, and community" with two of those outstanding digital marketing strategies.

a. Inbound marketing:

HubSpot is a marketing pioneer in inbound strategies. Inbound marketing focuses on creating valuable content and experiences for customers to raise the quality of leads organically. As a first step in attracting online readers on search engines, Hubspot produces a range of free content on the site's blog. They also increase the attention of audiences by releasing knowledge-sharing webinars, which are "one of our strongest lead generation tactics, especially for that conversion step" Mike Volpe – HubSpot chief marketing officer says. The majority of webinars concentrate on educational content and software demonstrations, which obtains a certain achievement since up to "13,000 people sign up for one of our webinars and

20% of the people that sign up for those will actually end up buying recorded in 2011”, Mike expressed. The marketing team also designed the specific Call-to-Actions (CTAs) for each webinar’s topic at the bottom of the blog posts to increase the conversion rate.

Moreover, HubSpot offers free e-books, instruction resources, and software demo attached to every single blog post to add more value to the customer journey and particularly present the brand as an expert on this subject. In today’s day and age, customers do not only want a product, but they additionally want a consultant.

HubSpot launched Website Grader Tool as a free tool to help businesses analyze their website. “It has graded more than 2 million websites over three years” (HubSpot Statistics). In other words, the firm provides a fact and offers a solution to improve it. That is the way they market their products.

HubSpot released another free training resource, HubSpot Academy, which offers free educational content on Marketing and Sales. As well as individuals, HubSpot's learning resources are utilized by multiple companies across the globe for employee training. In this manner, HubSpot earned credibility from customers as a reliable brand.

With high-performing inbound marketing strategies and successful SEO plans, HubSpot stays at the top of the search engines and becomes a highly trusted brand.

b. Marketing automation

HubSpot succeeds in creating and implementing marketing automation by collecting users’ data, automating digital marketing tasks and other marketing activities. Following that HubSpot can customize content and marketing approaches including email marketing, social media, content posts, and ad campaigns depending on audiences ‘demands. Therefore, marketing automation contributes to developing seamless and connected experiences for prospects and customers, enables a larger customer base, and enables them to be loyal customers.

4 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the author will demonstrate the method used for this study relied on the nature of the identified research “problem” (John, Hafiz, Robert, 2014) to highlight how the empirical data was collected and analysed.

4.1 Research method

“The first thing to get absolutely clear about is that research method and research methodology are not the same things! A research method is a way of conducting and implementing research. Research methodology is the science and philosophy behind all research” (Adams, John, et al.2014). In this thesis case, with the purpose of defining the influences of digital marketing on the customer experience, the author applied the research method with the availability of tools and data under the realm of research methodology.

There are two primary types of research paradigm: quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct research and analyse outcomes.

Quantitative research refers to the type of research that is based on the methodological principles of positivism and neo-positivism and adheres to the standards of a strict research design developed prior to the actual research (Adams, John, et al, 2014). Quantitative research is a process of obtaining data in numeric form in order to compare, measure, validate, and close down research inquiries. There are multiple approaches to conduct this research paradigm including survey, interview, experiment, and behaviour tracking.

The qualitative research uses a number of methodological approaches based on diverse theoretical principles (Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Social Interactionism). It employs methods of data collection and analysis that are non-quantitative, aims towards the exploration of social relations, and describes reality as experienced by the respondents (Adams, John, et al, 2014). In other words, qualitative is the process of collecting data in the non-numeric form (text, video) to answer the question “why” and dive deeper into the focus of the research inquiries. Conducting qualitative research requires a commitment in time, effort, and technologies due to the huge load of the analysing works. Common qualitative approaches are case studies, one-on-one interviews, and focused groups.

"There is no fundamental clash between the purposes and capacities of qualitative and quantitative methods or data" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 17). Both methodologies can be

supportive and compatible with each other with the aim of providing effective market research. Due to the scope of the research nature, the quantitative paradigm is chosen to support the idea of how digital marketing adds value to the customer experience.

4.2 Research approach

According to the book “Research Methods for the Social Sciences” by the author Wellington, Jerry, and Marcin Szczerbinski published 2007, there are eight stages in comprehensive quantitative research (Figure 8). This thesis will adopt the research spiral when conducting the experiment to stay consistent with the goal of resolving the research issue.

After stating the research problem (I), the author develops a hypothesis (II) by creating a list of questions and testable statements that relate to the hypothesis. In the third stage, operationalization of variables (III) is the process of defining variables and operationalizing them with relation to the research issue. The scope of the study on “how digital marketing adds value to the customer experience” consists of two primary variables: “digital marketing” and “customer experience”. They will be explicated and clarified in the terms of each variable to closely demonstrate the impact of those variables on each other in the research context. Operationalizing variables is the cornerstone to orientate the study designs. Study design (IV) refers to the market research method chosen to lead the study in the proper manner. As mentioned earlier, the quantitative paradigm is the selected method for this thesis case. Sampling selection (V) is the next step that the author will implement collecting the possible sample among the large population, which can provide insight into the overall observation. After the sampling process, data collection and analysis (VI) will be conducted in the questionnaire form with the aim of collecting reliable information to cater to analysis purposes including measuring, comparing, and resulting in sustainable insight. The researcher will decide whether to accept or reject the original hypothesis (VII). In the last stage of the spiral, evaluation, interpretation, and generation of results (VIII) will be performed in the report.

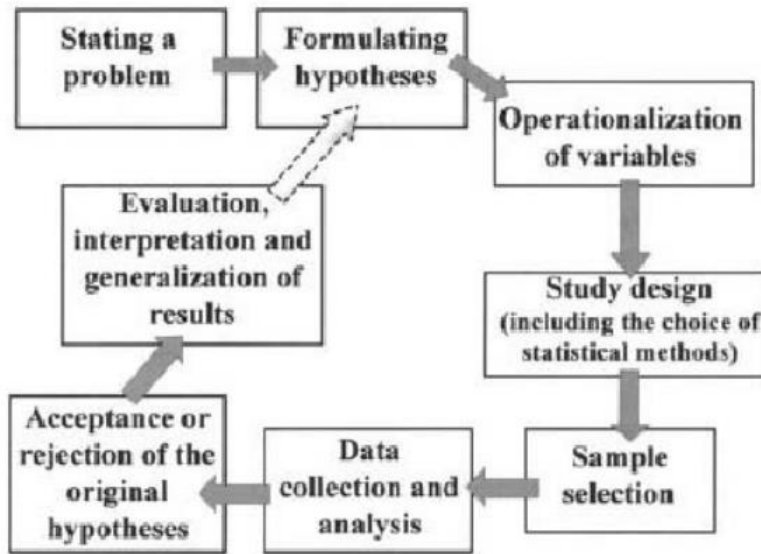


Figure 8. The quantitative research spiral

4.3 Data collection and analysis

4.3.1 Research analysis

As stated earlier, the research analysis relied on the data collection under the form of the questionnaire. An online survey was implemented from 10 – 20 September 2021 with the participation of the majority of respondents residing in Finland. The Google Form assisted the author to design and accomplish the lists of 10 questions divided into three sections: demographics, digital marketing interests and references, and the customer experience on digital platforms. There are 74 survey respondents, and all the information is anonymous. The purpose of the survey is to display the influences of digital marketing on enhancing the customer experience based on the real experiences of online users across digital channels.

Section I: Demographics

Question 1: How old are you?

The pie chart shows that the majority of participants were young adults with 75.7% for 18-25 and 20.3% for 26-35 years old. Two people aged 36-45 accounted for 2.7% and one over 55. Overall, there was a diversity of respondents' ages.

1. How old are you?

74 responses

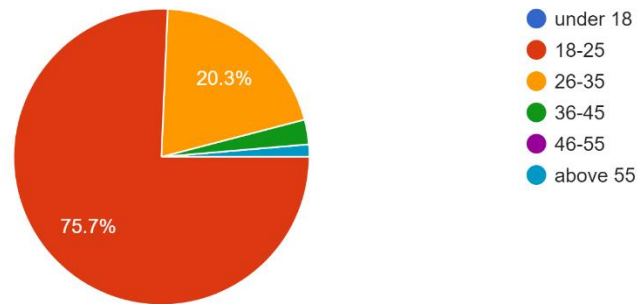


Figure 9. Ages of respondents

Question 2: What is your gender?

The chart indicated that twice as many respondents are female, which makes up 66.2% and the rate of 32.4% represents males. One respondent chose “refer not to say” option.

2. What is your gender?

74 responses

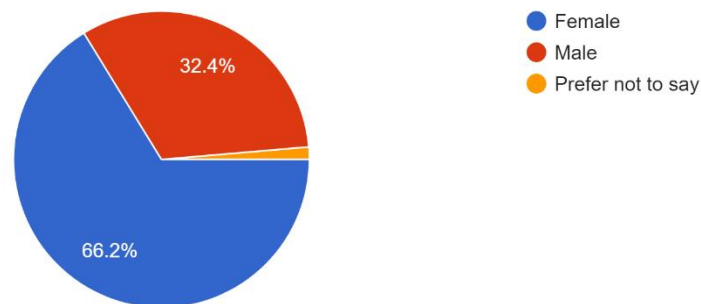


Figure10. Genders of respondents

Question 3: Are you currently ...?

The question expressed the current occupation of participants. The largest part of the chart makes up for 44.6% being a student. The second part is an employed for wages group, which

stands for 36.5%. Standing next is an unemployed group representing 13.5%. Lastly, it indicated that one person was retire, another is homemaker and two work as a self-employed position. The statistics shows the variety in the occupation, which can deliver an objective perspective about the interest and references of online users in the next section.

3. Are you currently...?
74 responses

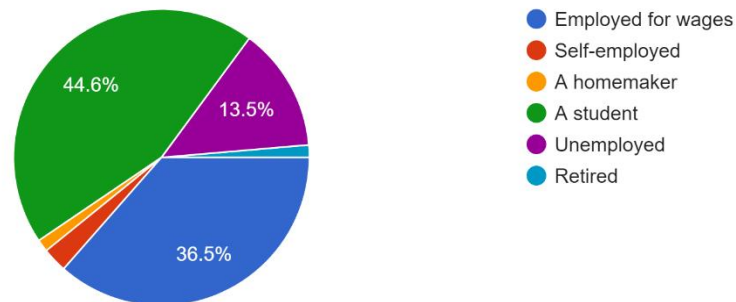


Figure11. Occupation of respondents

Section II: Digital marketing interests and references

Question 4: What are the digital platforms you frequently visit?

The question aims to illustrate users' interest in digital media channels currently. This is a multiple choice format that facilitates participants to select different options. The majority of responses belong to social media accounting for 91.9% overall where Netizens frequently visit. In addition, online users also expressed interest in the website, mobile, and search engine platforms by 74.3%, 59.5%, and 48.6%, respectively. The least response is game, which is 14.9% selection. However, game channels demonstrate a huge potential of ranking higher in the foreseeable future.

4. What are the digital platforms you frequently visit?

74 responses

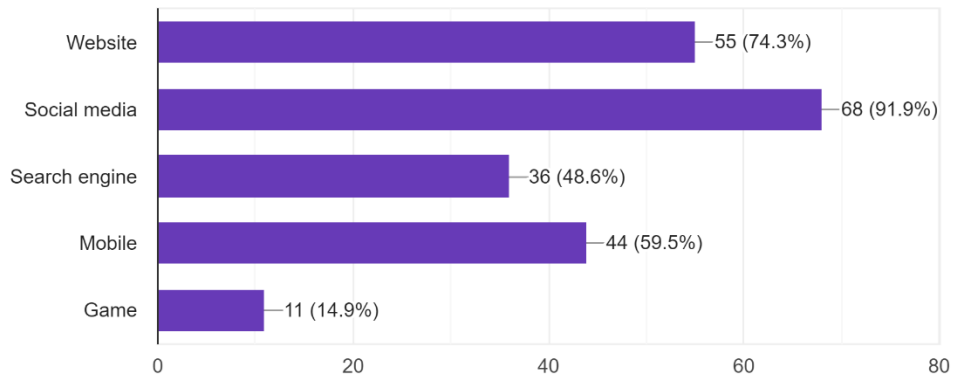


Figure 12. Referred digital platforms

Question 5: What will keep you regularly visit a website?

The question highlighted the reasons why internet users choose to make a regular visit on specific websites or digital channels, which will convert the deeper insight of customer behaviour and references to cater to the research's purpose. This is a multiple-choice grid format allowing online users to vote from 1 to 5 that 1 is non-relevant and 5 is highly relevant.

The column chart indicates the primary reasons evolving more netizens are the useful content and user-friendly website by 36 and 35 respectively. Next, convenience, data security, and personalized online services make up for 29, 23, and 22 respectively.

It demonstrates the fact that visitors look for a positive experience with the related content that can address their problems as easily and conveniently as possible. The website facilitated by the user-friendly feature, easy to access, fast speed, and helpful content will gain the interest of customers. The next element that digital users will expect is data security and personalized experiences, which will build trust and long-term interest for potential buyers.

5. What will keep you regularly visit a website?

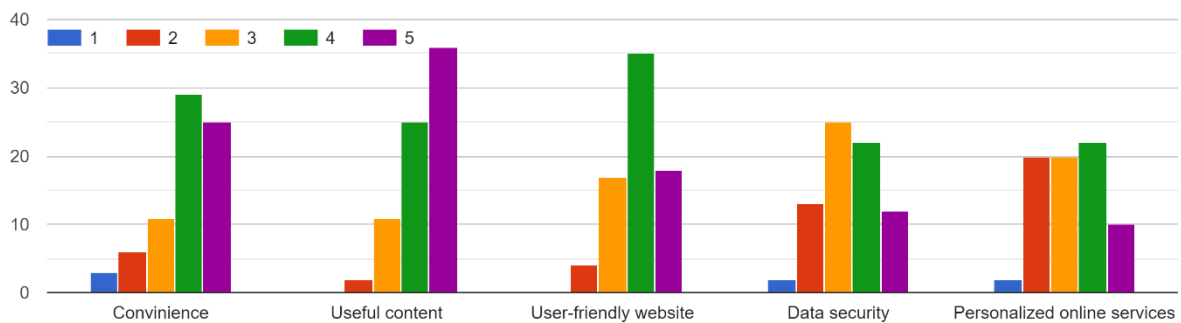


Figure13. Reasons of the regular visit

Question 6: What forms of content capture your interest?

After going through the sense of causes leading to the increase in the retention rate of visitors toward their favourable digital channels, particularly the website, question 6 focused profoundly on the types of content capturing visitors' interest. With similar format questions, respondents can rate their choices optionally.

It indicated that all types of content attract online users with homologous figures. Video, news articles, and social media posts achieve the highest score of from 4 to 5 overall. The other contents including online classes, research content, and blogs also raise the interest of customers on the digital platforms with the score of 3, which are reported as 28, 24, and 22 respectively.

In addition, some respondents also express their interest in the short videos, contents with eye-catching visuals, scientific reports, and podcasts.

The survey illustrated that the reality of the diversity of contents could capture online users' interest. Depending on the personal demands and purposes, customers can spend more time experiencing multiple types of content. However, it is undeniable that the majority of digital users show a high interest in social media posts, news articles, videos, and online classes. The survey was conducted when the Covid-19 pandemic occurs, which may have a significant impact on online user behaviour changes. For instance, online classes achieved a high interest

of respondents than the author's expectations. Social media posts showed the highest interest of online users while videos gains the increasing interest, which can contribute to higher engagement on the digital channels.

6. What forms of content capture your interest?

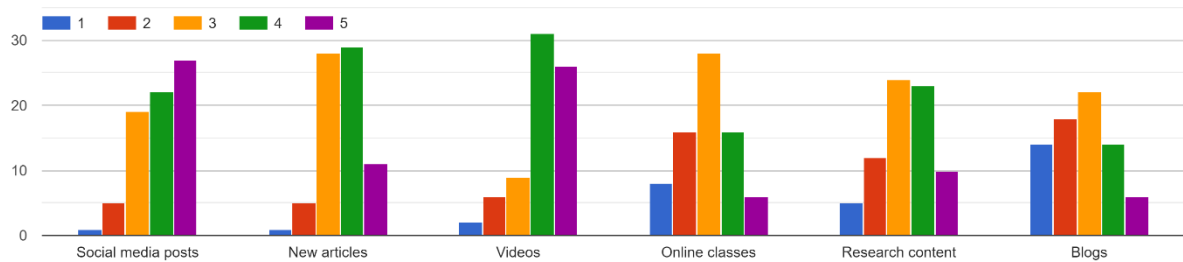


Figure 14. The interested content

Section III: The customer experience on digital platforms

Question 7: How would you perceive a trustworthy brand?

The question 7 given with the aim of identifying the correlation between the trustworthy brand and the experiences of customers. As a result, online users show the higher trust for authenticity and “provide a consistent experience” features with the score of 5. Besides, social influence, “offer added value” and “deliver on promises” also gain the high responses with the score of 4

In short, the higher the positive customer experience that the brand generates, the higher the trustworthy customers can present to the brand. It also shows the higher loyalty digital users tend to commit to the brand.

7. How would you perceive a trustworthy brand?

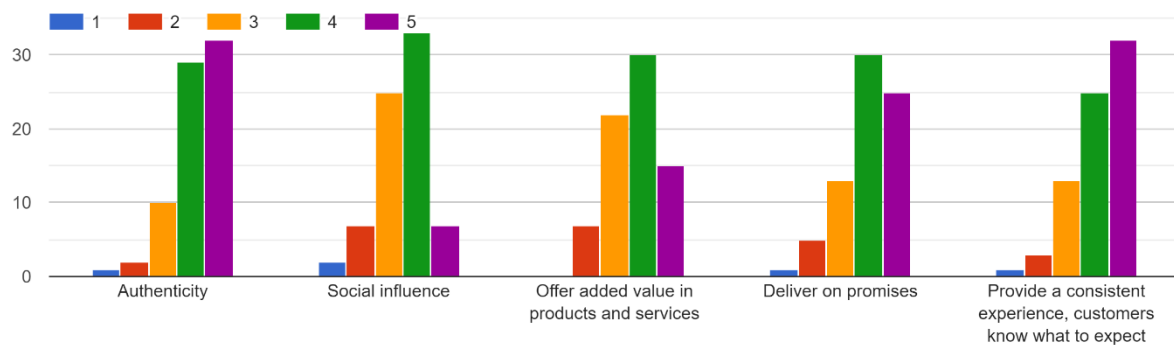


Figure15. Opinion about a trustworthy brand

Question 8: Please share a story of your positive online experience with any brand.

Seventeen responses have been shared on the survey. Some outstanding comments like:

“Zalando! Very prompt, high quality brands, money back guarantee”.

“Ikea has served me well and great for 3 years, since I bought all the home appliances there. It is convenient and fun”.

“I like Pinterest, this website offer me mostly every photos I need, even better. Since the day I started using Pinterest, my life is just better”.

“It's very important that brand or company can deliver on their promises, (good service, low prices etc.) like Verkkokauppa.com has did. They have simple path how to buy products from internet and they deliver products in time as they promise.”

All comments correspond to the given elements in question 7, also emphasize the importance of creating a positive customer experience in the process of building a trustworthy brand.

Question 9: What elements will make the WOW experience for you?

The purpose of question 9 is to estimate the vital factors that may involve in delivering a remarkable customer experience.

The majority of the listed ingredients have gained online users ‘consent for their ability to contribute to the WOW experience. In particular, the “quick response” option was selected as the most relevant factor with 34 respondents agreeing. Personalized services, gratitude expressions, and "offering something you weren't expecting" were up-and-coming factors for buyers, reaching 23, 21, and 21, respectively. Other factors including novel experiences, privacy and "gathering customer feedback" are also of interest to customers as the potential factors that can improve the customer experience.

9. What elements will make the WOW experience for you?

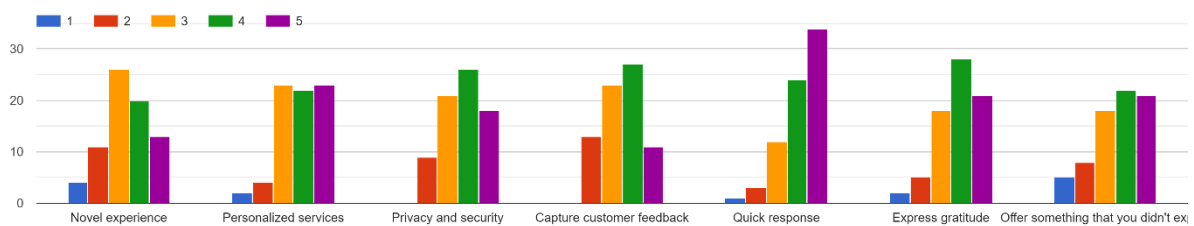


Figure16. Opinion about WOW experience

Question 10: What is your opinion when your data is collected by the website’s cookies?

The final question 10 represents digital users' concerns about their privacy and security when experiencing online.

The pie chart shows the largest share of this opinion, “I disagree, I want to keep my information private” accounting for 43.2%, while 25.7% of respondents agree that “the online experience will improve as my information is collected”. More than 28% of participants expressed a neutral opinion “it doesn't matter to me” about the collection of personal data on the site.

Overall, the statistics point to major privacy and security concerns on digital platforms. The collection of customer data to improve personalized experiences also obtains visitors’ consent, however, it is important to keep user information secure to enhance trust and engagement from purchasers.

10. What is your opinion when your data is collected by the website ' cookies?

74 responses

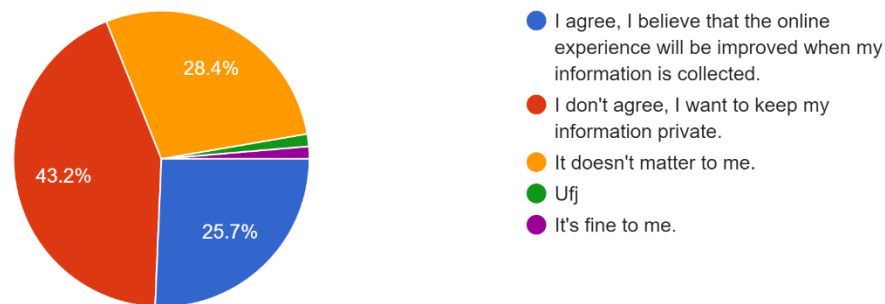


Figure 17. Opinion about data privacy and security

4.3.2 Research results

It is no exaggeration to admit that the online survey was successfully conducted with the participation of 74 digital users. This provides the insight into the correlation between digital marketing and the customer experience based on their actual experience.

The survey reached the target audience, in which more than 75% of the respondents are from 18-25 and 20.3 % are 26-35 years old. The primary occupation is the student and wage workers.

The empirical evidence displayed the audiences' interest and references across multiple digital platforms where social media, websites, search engines, and mobile are dominating the online market share. It also captures the diverse types of preferred content of online users, which are usually social media posts, videos, and news. The report shows that the key factors impacting user retention are useful content, a user-friendly website, convenience, data security, and personalized services.

In addition, the outcome also contributes to the perceptions about the role of the customer experience in brand loyalty and advocacy through digital platforms. It is essential for the brand to deliver the WOW experience to their target audience for building trust and gaining long-lasting interest. Quick response, express gratitude, capture customer feedback are the fundamental factors to show customers that the company values them throughout the customer journey. Beyond that, "offer something you didn't expect", personalized experience, data

privacy, and novel experience are the next elements that a business can offer to extend the customer experience.

5. THE CORRELATION BETWEEN DIGITAL MARKETING AND THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

5.1 The benefits of digital marketing in improving the customer experience

As stated earlier, digital marketing plays a vital role in the growth of a business. This is what determines whether or not the marketing campaign is successful in engaging more customers. Hence, applying effective digital marketing strategies is critical for the company to succeed. In this case, customer satisfaction is the ultimate purpose of utilizing digital marketing.

Digital marketing can affect customers' experiences directly and indirectly. When it comes to the tangible impact of digital marketing on enriching customer experience, digital media facilitates to create a multidimensional and continuous experience for audiences on online social platforms. In fact, a consumer's first stop before making a purchase decision is Google. Facebook, Instagram, and other media channels work as social forums where people share and discuss their interests, demands, and emotions. Evidently, digital channels constantly involve in every stage of the experience journey of customers, and play a vital role in generating positive or negative interactions for users.

The exploitation of social media platforms also aids the firm in enhancing customer service. For instance, more engaging with online users in social interactions, or proactively responding to them on their preferred channels that most respondents look for when they answer the question “What elements will make the WOW experience for you” in the empirical survey. This action turns the brand into a friend that the audience can trust and engage with more often. It is also a significant progress to build the emotional connection in the relationship between brands and their audiences. With the aid of digital marketing tools, any business seeking to develop customer-centric marketing strategies can gain tangible insight into users' habits utilizing the combination of digital marketing channels. Consequently, the company that offers valuable content on their official website, and high engagement on their social media channels, which allows buyers to effortlessly find the pertinent information across multiple digital channels has reached half the way to customer experience excellence (CEE).

Additionally, the intangible benefits of digital marketing contribute to improved customer satisfaction because of the ability to collect users' data. In other words, the majority of digital marketing tools track online users' information whether they are on any website, social media,

or apps. There is a huge amount of data collected every day including user identity, content consumption, purchasing history of every single user on multi-channels. The recorded data is in the process of analysing and transforming into useful insights for marketers to design more relevant content and advertisements for audiences to add more value to their customer journey. According to Digitalist, 67% of customers were willing to share their information in exchange for some form of benefit, like discounts and freebies. The empirical survey also demonstrated nearly one-third of total respondents believe that “the online experience will be improved when information is collected”. Intangible benefits of customer data analytics would include understanding the customer's needs and expectations, having an accurate picture of their personas, and increasing brand loyalty and retention.

In short, digital marketing is one of the most productive marketing methods and is populated among a wide range of businesses and e-retailers these days due to its multiple advantages. E-marketing is also the shortest way to narrow the distance between the brand and its audiences, with the aim of creating seamless comprehensive experiences for customers on the buying journey.

5.2 Potentials and challenges of digital marketing in enhancing customer experience

There is no room for doubt that digital marketing has been massively supporting the business in the process of establishing comprehensive experiences for customers in recent years. It continues blossoming with the development of technology and society. There are various potentials that a firm can exploit and utilize depending on demands and budgets. Digital marketing not only facilitates customer interaction with a brand via digital platforms, but also boosts ROI, product-brand awareness, fair competition among bigger brands on the digital market, and collaboration opportunities to develop business sustainability.

Despite the potentials and benefits of utilizing e-marketing in business management, there are several challenges remaining while creating an appropriate digital marketing strategy to enhance customer experience. Due to the rapid growth of digitalization, “too many marketing channels can decrease the nimbleness of response as marketers struggle to keep current” (Zahay, Debra, 2020, 40). That requires marketers to continuously stay up-to-date and be innovative to deliver an appealing customer experience, or “novel experience” which achieves high approval from participants when they respond to the question “What elements will make

the WOW experience for you” in the given survey. Simultaneously, the increasing sophistication of technology and devices also causes various troubles for business strategists in creating a seamless, consistent customer experience across all digital channels. Buyers could, for instance, search for the product on mobile while traveling and make a purchase on a laptop at home. The purchasing process becomes frustrating if buyers have to start the process again if the website on mobile and laptop are different. Thus, it is vital to tailor a user-friendly and consistent CX design where users can easily find all information wherever and whenever.

Another issue that should also be taken into account is that the firm has not fully exploited the functionalities of digital marketing. In other words, “Internet is treated as ‘just another channel to market’ without review of opportunities to offer improved, differentiated online services” (Chaffey, Dave, and Fiona, 2015). Consequently, “the results from digital marketing are not measured or reviewed adequately, so actions cannot be taken to improve effectiveness”, which leads to interrupted experiences for users, along with disappointment and disengagement. As “32% of customers stop doing business with a brand they love after only one negative experience” (Google Statistics).

While consumers nowadays highly consider personalization as an influential feature in their user journey, “80% of consumers are more likely to purchase when brands offer experiences personalized to them” (Epsilon), they are still worried about security and privacy when going online. In fact, nearly half of respondents answer “I want to keep information private” when it comes to the question of data collection. It illustrates one of the biggest challenges for most businesses is how to deliver a personalized experience for customers but still keep user privacy secured. Once this concern is addressed, it not only motivates customers to provide their information but also leverages trust and engagement from buyers and prospects.

5.3 Future digital trends to create the great CX strategy

It is undeniable that the constant presence of the COVID-19 pandemic expands the coverage of digitalization at the individual and organizational levels. The company places more and more investments in digital marketing initiatives expecting to receive sweet outcomes. In the age of customers, nothing matters to businesses more than the experiences of users. The emergence of advanced technology and rising expectations of buyers necessitate that the brand focus on establishing enchanting marketing plans. In fact, one of the most effective actions is to catch

up with potential trends to customize marketing tactics that aim to make customers more satisfied. Apart from utilizing the mentioned digital marketing channels above, there are five prospective marketing trends, which a brand can consider applying. This will improve the customer experience.

5.3.1 Video marketing

Ranking at the top of the list of the most dominant digital marketing trends is video marketing. Hubspot shows that 52 percent of consumers say that watching product videos makes them more confident in online purchase decisions. In addition, 65 percent of executives visit the marketer's website, whilst 39 percent call a vendor after viewing a video. These numbers expressed the fact that consumers love videos, especially those engaged with short, informative, funny, and straight-to-the-point content.

Youtube and the emerging channel – Tiktok consume millions of videos every day. The brand can utilize this type of content by producing vlogs, testimonials, products, and instruction videos to promote the consumption of online visitors. Integrating the video on the website as well as social channels will help the brand gain trust and authenticity from the eyes of viewers. Once the firm obtains attention, there will be an increase in traffic and conversion rate on the customer journey. The brand can define its personality through video marketing. Storytelling video with an emotional connection and pain point demonstrations will engage consumers more than ever, improving customer experience simultaneously. This is a great opportunity for businesses to shine out of the stage with a compelling video message.

5.3.2 Social media marketing

The term "social media marketing" is no longer a strange terminology among marketing strategists, but its endearment remains the same. The study conducted by GlobalWebIndex (2018) illustrates that 54 percent of social browsers use social media to research products, 71 percent of consumers who have had a positive experience with a brand on social media are likely to recommend the brand to their friends and family (Lyfemarketing, 2018). As active digital users become increasingly accustomed to social networking, it is similar to the way they used to spend 2-3 hours watching TV channels over 10 years ago. Since social media can be considered a habit, marketers can make use of it to generate enticing content to expand user

consumption. Producing original social media content that is fresh and never-been-done is the most effective way to achieve this. It could be a new trend or challenge that accounts for the highest content consumption at the moment. Original content attracts more attention and interaction from social browsers, who will share, comment, and tag others. The enjoyment of consuming your digital content is the positive signal of future customer engagement.

Furthermore, social media is the most effective tool to provide better customer service. For the "WOW experience elements" questions, the "quick response" option received the most votes in the empirical research. Online users expect to receive responses as soon as possible before feeling frustrated and unable to contact the brand. By simply asking a question and providing a prompt response, a brand can generate a "positive chemistry" between them and communities. Additionally, it demonstrates your brand personality and the human side behind digital tools and technological innovations. Performing excellent customer service is the shortest way to satisfy customer expectations.

5.3.3 Data-driven marketing

It is no surprise that data-driven marketing is the future of marketing. Forbes Magazine shows that 88% of companies have used data to improve their understanding of each consumer. Data analytics offers tremendous benefits to businesses to enhance the quality of customer experience. Utilising data provides businesses with information about customer journeys, specifically, when, where and how visitors make contact with a brand. Therefore, it offers insight into user behaviour, reference and purchase histories. As a result, marketers can generate more relevant and personalized content for netizens on the customer cycle. According to the statistics below, customers refer excessively to personalized experiences. The higher personalization they experience, the higher engagement they would like to commit to the brand.



The application of data analytics tools also facilitates predicting prospects and consumers' needs relied on the previous customer data, which allows businesses to forecast the buying trends and behaviours of purchasers more closely with the purpose of delivering superior experience and services for customers.

5.3.4 Augmented Reality

Augmented Reality (AR) is unquestionably one of the influential technologies of the digital revolution. This trend has attracted an increasing number of brands due to its application in a variety of industries including clothing, beauty, vehicles, furniture, and even real estate. The study from GetApp stated 46% of consumers who make their purchase through augmented reality return fewer items than if they had bought them without the technology. The question is why Augmented Reality has become so intriguing that Tim Cook, Apple's CEO, says the technology will be as important as eating three meals each day.

Augmented reality integrates real objects into digital contents- images, texts, and sounds. Buyers can use multiple devices including smartphones and tablets to scan the product and receive the virtual information. Adopting this technology, IKEA launched an app called IKEA Place that allows buyers to virtually “place” true-to-scale 3D furniture in their home. Nike is another visual testimonial that also offers an App to help purchasers measure a fit size for their shoes. This solution provides customers with a fresh - thrilling experience, which could be crucial to differentiating the brand and increasing word-of-mouth. In addition to providing an optimal solution for product-testing problems, augmenting reality helps businesses to enhance customer service and experience.

5.3.5 Voice technology

Finally, the booming of voice technology causes a breakout among consumer habits. People tend to use the voice function integrated into the smart devices to support the searching while their hands are occupied. Research from Brightedge stated that more than 50% of customers would leverage the use of voice-activated technology in their daily lives or 46% of people using voice search daily are searching for local business (Brightlocal).

In addition, the search engines also witnessed the incredible increasing volume of voice searching for products or any kind of content. ThinkwithGoogle showed 27% of the global online population is using voice search on mobile. Updating with this trend, Amazon released Echo – a smart speaker working as a "home automation hub" (Amazon) to assist humans in setting the alarm, checking the weather forecast, streaming music, online search, and especially controlling the smart home.

Voice technology or voice commerce acts as the virtual personal assistant helping customers in the device-controlling, searching, and buying process. Simultaneously gathering the information from users to personalize their searches and experience. It is undeniable that voice assistant embraces the great flexibility and convenience for owners to perform searching at anytime and anywhere. It also increases privacy and proactivity when customers can interact with services by themselves before approaching any human assistant since 67% of customers actually prefer self-service to deal with an employee (Zendesk). In this way, customers can feel the concentration from the brand on them, hence, the trust and credibility are built to reinforce the relationship between the brand and its audience. Adopting the voice technology trend is a sublime formula to generate an exceptional customer experience.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Research implications

The intention of this thesis is to demonstrate the correlation between digital marketing strategies and the story of improving the customer experience in the digital landscape, and how Hubspot – B2B software company accomplished to achieve customer experience excellence (CEE). By approaching “smart” digital marketing strategies including inbound marketing and marketing automation, Hubspot succeeded in delivering relevant – valuable content to its customers and prospects. The position where trust is built from zero to a sustainable level is proven by the fact of Hubspot is now known as an expert in terms of marketing, sales, and services software. Hubspot content frequently appears on top of the search engines. That is the evidence of a win-win relationship occurring when the business adds more value to the customer journey in the exchange of customer engagement and advocacy with the aid of effective digital marketing tools. This helps marketing campaigns spread faster and last longer on social platforms. Thus, it is undeniable that digital marketing enhances customer experiences both tangibly and intangibly. By providing digital social platforms, brands and online users can communicate and interact more effectively. At the same time, it offers digital marketing tools for data collection and analysis to create more relevant content for the target audience.

In addition, the empirical research also contributes to the authentication of the roles of digital marketing in delivering a delightful customer experience. The respondents showed high interest in multiple electronic channels including websites, social media, search engines and mobile, and also express their commitment when these channels meet certain requirements such as useful content, user-friendly interface, convenience, data security, and personalized services. It displayed the high correlation between digital marketing channels and customer satisfaction. They will “fall in love” with the brand that delivers promises, quick responses, or regularly interacts with online users on social media platforms.

The findings of the study also illustrate the opportunities and challenges that the business may deal with while implementing digital strategies to support the customer journey more rhythmically. While technological advancement offers more golden chances than risks, the brand should also consider prudent considerations before adopting any digital marketing strategies and tools to increase customer value. Every decision should be reflected on

customers' point of view as more than ever, the way audiences see and feel could decide how the business will survive in the competitive market. Developing an emotional connection is crucial to form first positive attention, and then outstanding experiences.

6.2 Validity and reliability

In this section, the quality of the thesis will be discussed centering on two underlying factors: validity and reliability. In fact, there are no certain criteria to examine the standard of validity and reliability. Nevertheless, these two elements can still be estimated depending on the nature of the thesis and the method. A primary goal of the study is to verify the effectiveness of digital marketing in improving customer experience through a quantitative method. With a detailed research design integrated with a consistent research method, this thesis has met the demand in terms of quality requirements, particularly, validity and reliability.

When it comes to reliability, the concept refers to the consistency of a measure “most of the time closely associated with subjectivity and once a researcher adopts a subjective approach towards the study, then the level of reliability of the work is liable to be compromised” Wilson (2010). The thesis follows the same process as VAMK's thesis instructions. This procedure consists of academic coursework, a research proposal, research plan review, questionnaire design approval, and a thesis report with the supervisory examination. Collecting data process through the empirical research was conducted in a serious manner. The 74 respondents answered the same set of 10 questions based on their experience with digital marketing channels. The outcomes were measured on a visual demonstration including multiple charts and tables on Google Forms. The authenticity and specificity of the response greatly increase the reliability of the thesis.

With regard to validity, the notion refers to the accuracy of a measure. In support of this thesis, the author employed reliable and valid sources to illustrate perceptions of digital marketing, customer experience, personas, and the customer journey. The researcher also uses academic findings to standardize the questionnaire design for maximum accuracy. The authentic amount of respondents also provide valid answers from their own experience with digital marketing. This overall helps the author to deliver high validity in the concept of research quality.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

With This thesis primarily clarifies the overall implications of digital marketing and the customer experience concept within the digital stage. This is with respect to the influence of digital marketing on the customer experience perspective. Therefore, it may contain limitations at a certain academic level. A follow-up study should either reassess theories or expand the discussion based on the fluctuations of the actual situation. In the context of digitalization, digital marketing trends involving video and social media marketing greatly impact the experience of online consumers. The impact of these trendy digital marketing tools on user experience can be studied in the future, including their potential and challenges. These factors, which are not clearly presented in the thesis, should also be considered for future discussion.

In addition, the thesis only focuses on digital marketing for the purpose of enhancing CX, but there are also other substantial aspects of CXX. Besides technology, humans always play a crucial role in leveraging the experience of consumers by creating an emotional connection. In today's day and age, the responsibility of creating a superior customer experience is not only the job of customer services or marketing employees. It is the duty of all business staff. Every department should put itself in the shoes of customers, provide solutions or innovative ideas based on a customer's point of view, in order to increase customer value. In order to come up with the full picture of the customer experience, this research problem needs to be considered and developed.

In fact, there is a growing number of online consumers, which illustrates a deeper concern for a new phenomenon – digital customer experience (DCX or DX). Essentially, this is a part of customer experience, but it focuses on the experience of customers on technological platforms. In contrast, classic customer experience encompasses all customer interactions with a company. Thus, the future study could modernize a discussion on digital customer experience and its application in marketing.

To sum up, as the research is conducted under quantitative methodology, it may contain several shortcomings regarding results and data collection. Having a low-medium number of respondents from a particular demographic, in this case, young people and employees for wages could produce subjective opinions based on personal experiences through multiple channels in different circumstances. This could affect the relationship with data results and

narrow the depth of the research problem. Therefore, it is suggested that a larger participation scope will present more objective and accurate outcomes. A future study may also integrate both quantitative and qualitative methods when conducting empirical research, which could provide a deeper perspective for the discussion.

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