

Conceiving innovative approaches to in-product communication (IPC) relating to product development, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and marketing mix towards achieving better customer engagement and ROI (return on investment)

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Abstract:

The marketing communication currently leverages on the in-product communications (IPC) as a cutting-edge digital technology to gather customer feedback as an increasingly preferential mode over other forms such as email marketing, etc. However, the success of IPC to achieve an organisation's goal would largely contingent on ways it would be related to a host diverse domain such as product development, integrated marketing communication, marketing mix, etc. The research aims at a discourse primarily relying on McLuhan's range of media theories combined with emerging perspectives of his subsequent revisionists and critics such as Umberto Eco.

Introduction

New age marketing is certainly progressing into in-product communications (IPC) which are embedded messages, content, and related media consumables delivered directly to a targeted audience (TA)'s internet-connected contraption or application, with the aim of informing, gleaning feedback from, engaging with, or reaching out to that particular TA or segment of clientele at a relative higher engagement rates than via other digital marketing and online marketing channels. The feedback-loop created through IPC to gather market intelligence is acknowledged to have much greater success over email or any other digital marketing product.

The study focusses to learn how organisations are recently using IPC to engage with their TA by delivering critical messages direct to TA's products without the barriers and clutter of emails or anything similar form of messaging. TA has been found to have been better targeted through product registration, guarantee/warranty sales, product user manuals, surveys, product reviews, etc. IPC thus has been acknowledged to have found the lowest friction way to engage with TA.

The proposed research will focus how to successfully encrypt marketing messages in IPC, and to investigate the subsequent influences it would have on the marketing mix, IMC, etc. Also, the research would aim to arrive at a model to gauge the customer engagement rate that may have increased over traditional channels impacting company's ROI (return on investment), increasing leads for the sales team and reaching new TA segments.

The research aims to demythologise that email putatively serves as the most effective digital marketing tactic and the channel that delivers the best ROI for an organisation.

The research also aims to contradict email communication's effectiveness that is related to latter perceive ease. The research argues that the extent to which email marketing communication is known for its "ease of use" contingents on the sophistication of particular marketing strategy. If such a thing could be replaced with innovative IPC it can find greater customer engagement. However, the research also guards itself against the pitfall as many empirical studies suggest that there is always less enthusiasm for the effectiveness of paid search, despite the latter being higher on the totem pole of "ease of use". Apart from digital marketing communication through email the research would examine the perceived effectiveness of participatory media vis-à-vis to IPC. The participatory media includes community media, blogs, wikis, RSS, tagging and social bookmarking, music-photo-video sharing, mashups, podcasts, video projects and

videoblogs and many other forms that feature in citizen media or as a form of expression of a democratic media.

The research would endeavour to find out the key problem areas with social media with relation to ROI measurement as opposite to IPC which is likely to appeal the marketers for the latter could provide more accurate measurement of ROI.

Methodology

The research would rely on McLuhan's text on 'The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man' to relate the current discourse on IPC to cultural studies and media ecology and subsequently intend to find out how communication technology such as all forms of IPC can have a bearing on cognitive organization, which in turn has huge ramifications for social organization.

Further, based on McLuhan's other texts 'Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man' and "The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects" the research would focus on exploring the concepts of the medium in TA as such medium has a social effect -- McLuhan exemplifies an electric bulb that enables individuals to create spaces during night which would otherwise be engulfed by darkness -- thus, marketing content in the process miss the structural changes in consumers' affairs that creep into their lives subtly, or over long span of time.

The discourse on the IPC indicates at the social implications of the medium and the current research particularly tries to unravel the values, norms, and the TA's ways of doing things that have changed because of the ways and means the technology is put into use in IPC. The social implications of the medium -- devices and Internet -- thus, can be ranged from the current cultural and behavioural patterns to their historical precedents. The enquiry based on McLuhan's methods will focus on knowing how through interplay with existing conditions, to the secondary or tertiary effects in a cascade of interactions have allowed certain behavioural/usage patterns to surface.

McLuhan's personalisation of the term "massage" to denote the effect each medium has on the individual sensorium -- can help current research to know how IPC has a bearing upon TA in this context and how IPC can account for the inventory of the "effects" of numerous media in terms of how they "massage" the sensorium. It would be a significant revelation how IPC upholds McLuhan's paradigm "each medium engenders a different "massage" or "effect" on the human sensorium' or even "all media including IPC are "extensions" of consumer senses, bodies and minds."

Also, all forms of IPC unravel itself as they are subjected to McLuhan's concept of "tetrad of media effects" based on the questions such as what does a particular medium can enhance, or make obsolete, or retrieve that had been obsolesced earlier and flip into when pushed to extremes. Replicating McLuhan in an IPC scenario will aim at creating a new diagrammatic representation of the "tetrad of media effects": 1. Enhancement (figure): What IPC amplifies or intensifies; 2. Obsolescence (ground): What IPC dispels from prominence; 3. Retrieval (figure): What IPC retrieves which was previously not found; 4. Reversal (ground): What happens to IPC when pushed to its limits.

However, as the research would employ the cultural tools and methods of McLuhan it would not lose sight of Umberto Eco, contention that McLuhan's medium conflates channels, codes, and messages under the overarching term of the medium, confusing the vehicle, internal code, and content of a given message in his framework.

Literature Review & Discourse

Despite social media mining's claim of arrived at host of algorithms suitable for investigating massive social media data using tools such as data mining, social network analysis, machine learning, ethnography, search engine optimisation the research would establish still all these fail to convincingly encompass that represent, measure, model, and mine meaningful patterns from large-scale social media data.

Though the research does not disown the progress of theories and methodologies on social media mining it is still not sufficient to convince the organisations and marketers to accurately relate this data to ROI, customer engagement, counting the leads generated for the sales team or identification of new TA or reaching out to new customer segments.

Hence, the current research argues that the employment of IPC can reduce the marketing and customer service cost as opposed other forms of digital marketing including email marketing. Also, the research points out to decline of popularity of email marketing as McKinsey's iConsumer reports ¹decline in email usage as the medium surrendered ground to social networks, participatory media and mobile messaging apps, etc.

However, studying the consumer behavioural pattern through email would always remain one of the key pursuits of the current research, because email is omnipresent and pervaded all forms of lives. As organisations learning from their experiences to create more personalized email offerings, based on individual consumer' onsite and catalog shopping behavior, can always serve to create improved IPC models. Nora Aufreiter² recounts Flash sales site Gilt Groupe, that each day puts across over 3,000 variations of email, each tailored to past user click-throughs, browsing history, and purchase history. Such effort of Gilt Groupe can serve to create true customization and targeting abilities which can transform the existing processes adopted by IPC and other forms of digital marketing that are tailored to specific capabilities and supporting infrastructure. Since customer information scattered across the organization, hence always must be aggregated for a customer on a single window, the IPC thus must find ways personalise these messages.

Along with McKinsey's findings the Yesmail Email Marketing Compass report does require to be a part of current research's literature review as its analysis of email metrics identifies key trends and outlines major implications to enable marketers prepare for a certain task. Extrapolating the data from the discrepancy between mobile and desktop click-to-open (CTO) rates, it is concluded that conversion in the form of a click is the key challenge for mobile email marketing and converting on mobile poses additional challenges. Due to screen size of a handheld mobile, divided attention span while on-the-go, and varied user experience, mobile email viewers are less likely to click on a message than their counterparts sitting at their desks. Unless the email speaks to customers' needs in the right context and calls upon for an immediate action, mobile clicks would not improve significantly enough to match desktop clicks, the Yesmail Email Marketing Compass report asserts.

Any discourse IPC also must always trace its origin to a product-development process to know the key differences underlying the product. Such an exercise would enable to identify the patterns of communication employed by marketing, engineering and manufacturing; it is possible that all despite being in the same organisation still may have worked at a cross-purpose with each other. The current endeavour would be to model the research on the findings of Griffin and Hauser (1992) who examine communication patterns for two matched product-development teams where the key difference between the groups is that first used a phase-review development process while the other employed Quality Function Deployment (QFD), a product development process adopted by North American and Japanese companies in early 90s. The empirical study suggests that QFD enhances communication levels within the core team (business development and manufacturing). QFD alters the communication patterns from 'up-over-down' precipitating through management to more horizontal routes where the core team members communicate directly with each other. On the contrary, the QFD team communicates less on planning information and less with stakeholders of organisation external to the team.

The focus on product relates IPC to product roadmap and future releases, competitive analysis. It can be considered to be a departure from Pragmatic Marketing Framework (a standard language which serves as a brief for whole product team entailing a blueprint of the key activities to be undertaken to bring profitable, problem-oriented products to market) and engage the IPC to product management triad (the larger product management and product marketing functions). As digital marketing is increasingly leveraging on IPC as a potent tool the collection of feedback data of the new age marketing is now shifted away from email marketing, search engine marketing (SEM), social media marketing and mobile advertising among host of other digital innovations.

However, IPC's current challenge is to make it agree to Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), as the latter relies on the application of consistent brand messaging across both traditional and

non-traditional marketing channels and employing variegated promotional methods to reinforce each other.

For example, it would be interesting to find out how an organisation needs to strategise its IPC to marry it off to specific segments of consumers in order to provide related support which can range from do-it-yourself/user guides /training materials to initiate orders of replacement parts.

The data capture of IPC too also needs to be synchronised with organisation's existing online/internet system related to its presence in social media (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Orkut, LinkedIn, Google Hangout and Plus, Foursquare, flickr, Pinterest, YouTube, Wikipedia, Instagram) or its stakeholders' presence in participatory media (community media, blogs, wikis, RSS, tagging and social bookmarking, music-photo-video sharing, mashups, podcasts, participatory video projects and videoblogs) that allows a certain process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating content. IPC leverages on communication platforms that can auto-capture device information including product serial number, code, type of operating system, product version number, or other encryptions, location, and potentially any metadata agreed-upon by the TA to be shared. A lot of these data, if not complied to procedural requirement stated within consumer laws and organisation's policies, can create massive challenges the ways IPC is adopted to function.

The discourse will classify all the forms of IPC -- in-device communication, in-app communication and direct-to-computer /direct-to-desktop communication, etc. -- in order to target the market segments and delivery more effectively. The overcrowding of email as the most popular digital marketing toolkit can be evident from declining open rates, engagement rates, lower cost-per impression, clicktag, cost per click, view-through rate, abandonment rate, ad serving, banner blindness, cost per action, cost per thousand, click-through rates, and lower conversion rates. Thus, IPC can emerge as the most accurate alternative, or if not, at least as a supplement to other digital marketing channels including email.

The complexities of organisation, which accordingly shaping marketing communication, allow for a certain way to classify products/services to gain strategic marketing insights. Lovelock's proposed schema for classifying services in ways that transcend narrow industry boundaries allowing nature of service to affect a marketing task can serve to classify all IPC forms. Also, believing McLuhan 'the medium is the message' paradigm -- the form of a medium embeds itself in the message engendering a symbiotic relationship by which the medium dictates how the message is perceived and interpreted -- the IPC cannot be talked about in isolation without the devices and software or the technologies it engages.

The devices and internet, both can be considered as mediums for messages, according to McLuhan are shaping and controlling the scale and form of TA's association and action". The manner in which medium employed by IPC played with conceptions of speed and time transubstantiate the sequence and connections into a panoply of creative configuration and structure. The medium such as devices and Internet in TA are the messages themselves, and the communication messages in TA must be considered as another medium.

In-device communication or in-device messaging as a form of IPC known to adopt messaging communications directly to a TA's device screen, without conduiting through a software application, can make the message accessible through an internet-connected printer, the screen on the handheld controller of a UAV or drone, or the screen of an internet-connected television. Through the mode of messaging the organisation must engage in a form of controlled messaging as IPC is integrated directly into an operating system of the internet-connected device. Feeding these messages as a part of controlled messaging creates its feedback-loop and content and engage with TA from directly on the device display.

Similarly, the in-app communication or in-app messaging, the act of messaging, obtaining feedback, or otherwise communicating with TA through a software application, either on a mobile handset or tablet, or through software on a personal computer. In this mode of communication, a communication platform is embedded as a software module in the application, usually leading to faster technology deployment, as compared to the integration timeline of in-device communication platforms. Direct-to-computer communication or Direct-to-desktop communication, or on-desktop messaging is the particular form of messaging, obtaining feedback, or otherwise communicating with TA through a software application or embedded peripheral driver on a personal computer system. TA interacts with messages on the screen of the computer system, and the product manufacturer serves controlled messaging from the back-end

system. To embed the IPC in IMC, notwithstanding the fact that the latter still an emerging discipline in an open economy, Holm's identified stages of IMC can be serving the purpose of this research. Holm starts his identification process from tactical coordination to financial and strategic integration. The current research can move beyond Holm's findings of majority of organisations that are anchored in the first stages and a handful to a strategic level – in order to know the impediments little more intimately that prevent organisations moving from tactical to strategic level. Holm in study of big-ticket Swedish organisations found that the decisions pertaining to IMC were rooted on these companies' advertising agency level and always had failed to appear on management level, thus the marketing communication had limitations.

Further, since the IMC and brand identity as critical components of an organisation's brand equity strategy it relevant to the current research to arrive at a conceptual framework with testable research propositions toward IMC theory development and the bearings it would have on IPC. What would serve this purpose is Madhavaram, Sreedhar et al (2005) brand equity strategy schematic that elaborates (1) the role of IMC in engendering and sustaining brand equity, and (2) the role of brand identity in informing, guiding, and assisting to develop, nurture, and implement the organisation's overall IMC strategy.

Conclusion

The in-product communication demands to be spread across all marketing verticals and using entire gamut of toolkit (search engine marketing to social media) supported by the strategy used by an organisation to reach targeted segments of their consumer base to provide in-product customer service and support, supply training materials and paraphernalia, and initiate orders of replacement parts and consumables. As organisations increasingly gathering user intelligence and feedback on their consumer base – the email requests for such information continues to decline – there will be more innovations in the in-product communications that are delivered to the device of a consumer. This will create a new paradigm-shift in companies' engagement with in-product data management (schematic or CAD drawing Material data-sheets, etc.) and in-product communication platforms to auto-capture device information, like brand name, part number, part description, supplier/vendor, unit of measure, cost/price, serial number, model number, operating system, version number, location, and potentially any additional metadata available from, and agreed-upon by the user.

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