Digital marketing: a new tool for international education

Marketing Digital : Una nueva herramienta para internacionalizar la educación

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Abstract

In a digital age, International Education has undergone several changes. Digital platforms have eased the way students can access to academic information. Therefore, the education industry has implemented tools to effectively adapt business to students' needs.

Digital Marketing and its components have been emerging in International Education to improve its business practices. Therefore, institutions have been encouraged to promote these mechanisms and adopt them into their corporate structures.

The use of online strategies is an optimal channel to attract students. Digital marketing has turned into the ultimate tool to proactively excel in the competition.

To show the results of this deductive research paper, an example of the company Big Choice Group will examine the causes and consequences of implementing Digital Marketing in the International Education industry.

This paper will present evidence with an analysis of a model on how a multinational has obtained positive results with the implementation of digital strategies.

Keywords: *Digital Marketing – Institutions – Education – Students – Admissions*

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Resumen

En la era digital, la Educación Internacional ha sufrido varios cambios. Las plataformas digitales han facilitado la forma en que los estudiantes acceden a la información académica. Por lo tanto, la industria de la educación ha implementado herramientas para adaptar eficazmente el negocio a las necesidades de los estudiantes.

El Marketing Digital y sus componentes han estado inmersos en la Educación Internacional para mejorar sus prácticas de negocios. Por lo tanto, se ha alentado a las instituciones a promover estos mecanismos y adoptarlos en sus estructuras corporativas. El uso de estrategias en línea es un canal

óptimo para atraer estudiantes. El marketing digital se ha convertido en la herramienta definitiva para resaltar proactivamente de la competencia.

Para mostrar los resultados de la investigación deductiva, un ejemplo de la empresa Big Choice Group examinará las causas y consecuencias de la implementación de Marketing Digital en la industria de la Educación Internacional. Este documento presentará evidencia con un análisis de cómo una multinacional ha obtenido resultados positivos de la implementación de estrategias digitales.

Palabras clave: *Marketing Digital – Instituciones– Educación – Estudiantes – Admisiones*

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has changed the way consumers perceive business strategies. From the age of finding out the day's events on the morning newspaper, to instant gratification with updates from social media, people's perception has been shaped by a technology based bubble, whose access is limited to a digital platform (Ghotbifar, 2017).

Consequently, businesses have implemented strategies that are carried out in that media platform to provide an interactive, focused and measurable way of reaching consumers. This strategy is commonly known as Digital Marketing. (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

The concept of digital marketing was first used in the 1990s, although at that time, it was mainly about advertising to customers. However, during the decade of 2000 and 2010, with the emergence of new social and mobile tools, the concept was expanded. It was transformed from an advertising oriented technique for users, to a concept of creating an experience that engages with them (Brosnan, 2012).

Digital Marketing has turned into an essential tool to compete in the market. Since everyone is unintentionally immersed into the digital era, its usage is the most efficient tool to reach potential consumers (Kannan, 2017).

This paper will explore how the digital revolution has impacted one of the businesses with wider scope with the implementation of Digital Marketing. Since Millennials are the protagonists of this technology-based era, the greatest influence they have is education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to globalization, technology has been exerting pressure on businesses to adapt their practice into modern and diverse mechanisms that society is currently demanding (Kannan, 2017). Multinational corporations recognize the importance of implementing a digital relationship with consumers. According to Yadav & Pavlou (2014) digital technological devices such as smart products and Artificial Intelligence are the cornerstones of consumers' transformation. They are reshaping marketing strategies that back in the time corporations implemented with the aim of creating needs or cover people's demands.

Digital Marketing has expanded the boundaries of education. In this era, educational institutions from all over the world are no longer finding it difficult to market themselves to their audience or suffer from a lack of brand awareness. Due to the big spread of information, educational institutions have the chance to show the opportunities that students could get from the service they provide, not only in the country but in a worldwide market (PATRUTIU BALTES, 2015).

Years ago, institutions used to promote their services on a basic platform that was merely dependent on budget. Most of the high budget institutions could communicate massively their services mainly through TV commercials or radio jingles. In contrast, institutions with a lower budget would have taken the options of fairs, and publications in magazines (Mazzarol, 1998).

Nevertheless, the globalized world has provided the opportunity to have a digital platform as a communication tool in common. By using this tool, the budget is not limited to the access to the platform but directly proportional to the scope of consumers they want to reach and therefore, the investments they are enabled to undertake (Krskova, 2017).

An efficient application of Digital Marketing

Before the use of Digital Marketing within a corporate structure, it is necessary to understand the effect that digital platforms exert over customers' purchase process. It involves not only the study of the consumption chain, but also the changing environment where the consumers are allocated (Kannan, 2017).

The way of acquiring the information is a key factor when it comes to analyzing elements impacting consumer consumption. Moreover, some studies have shown that one of the tools that is mostly used to get an insight of consumer perception, behavior and risk is market research.

Consumer behavior is a key factor to determine the value they are acquiring throughout the purchasing process from the "consideration stage", all along until the "purchase". If it turns out that consumers get value from its purchase, then the possibility of creating loyalty increases. (Häubl, 2000).

On top of that, there is a margin of error when applying market research into a project for a digital structure. The reason is that digital platforms are available for everyone, and its usage needs to be addressed efficiently in order to add value to the business. Digital Marketing has to be structured and led by what the enterprise wants to communicate, otherwise its outcome will be inefficient and the tool obsolete (Rhein, 2017).

When using a digital marketing strategy, the company needs to build a structured framework. The strategy should be implemented once the institution knows what it wants to communicate and the market to which it is directed (Castronovo & Huang, 2012).

According to Bruyn (2008), digital marketing has four main aspects that are found in a business platform: Web/mobile marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), social networks, and Customer Relationship Management (CRM).

Web/mobile marketing

It refers to the mobile platform that allows businesses to sell. This tool is a new form of media that helps businesses to develop highly targeted campaigns (Ferris, 2007). In international education, some companies have implemented this tool with the aim of covering a massive audience. BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) companies are institutions that encourage people to use their devices to complete assessments or to have access to enterprise resources (Gwaltney, 2015).

Open Ratio is a BYOD company operating in the international education field. This tool helps companies to build applications for students, teachers or parents interested in the education area (Kannan, 2017).

Since the protagonists of the digital age are young people, they are highly inclined to use their devices everywhere (Truong & Simmons, 2011). Therefore, it is important to create access to the companies through the mobile devices.

However, there are some authors that criticize the use of mobile phones during working hours despite of the efficiency- oriented benefit that those devices can provide to the users and the company. According to Andrews (2014), there is a negative relationship between the use of cellphones and the working environment especially when it comes to the personnel. He cites that even though the device can be used as a tool, it can distract from the work duties, delay the completion of daily tasks and disrupt in meetings that require attention.

In contrast, Shonola (2016) has shared a position regarding the use of those devices in the International Education Industry. Since the scope of the business is the learning market, smart devices have the ability of inspiring new approaches to learn. The same author highlights the importance for International Education companies to use that tool as the most effective mean of communication with their targets. Additionally, since it is also a learning tool, the more they use portal devices, the more possibilities companies have to ensure that students can visit their education platforms.

Search Engine Optimization

People use search engines for their queries; however, most of the time they prefer the options that are available on first page. According to Kumar (Gunjan, 2012), only 3% of the users, not considering researchers, choose to click on the next pages for further results. Consequently, if the page of the business is in the 3rd or 4th page, then the possibilities of getting a return from the investment, diminishes. That is the reason why firms have been working on search engines optimization (SEO). It is the way to increase visibility of a webpage by usual means such as search results that are unpaid (Gunjan, 2012). The process starts with a redevelopment that makes the key words already existent more effective to communicate with major search engines.

SEO targets image, local, video and academic search. When it comes to optimization, SEO encompasses content edition as well as HTML codes to improve the webpage relevance to particular keywords and appropriate indexing (Liu & Nain, 2006).

This tool is a technique to turn a document from a webpage into a search engine's top search result. The online presence of an institution is more than an easy and fast way to reach customers among the target; it is also one of the most profitable ways, too (Gunjan, 2012). If a company types a key word rather than the company's name in a search engine, and the result appears in the first page, then the company is optimizing its website and is also getting more profitable results (Wang, Li, & Zhang, 2011).

What most consumers use as a search engine is Google. There are two main reasons why they use Google. The first one is that it is one of the most popular and friendly search engines, being visible will increase the chances of improving profitability for the organization. The second reason is that a great deal of search engines use search patterns from Google, thus, if a company optimizes its webpage in Google, it is also optimized for those others search engines.

Campaigns for search engine optimization are becoming essential for digital marketing strategies. Besides of the usage the company gives to a SEO, it can also take advantage of the paid search advertisements, so that other companies can promote themselves (Rutz & Bucklin, 2011).

Additionally, companies need to measure their websites ranking, so that they can analyze traffic, clicks, and impressions of search engines users.

The most popular academic search engine is Google scholar (Dixon & Duncan, 2013). With this tool, finding journals and articles are no longer an inconvenient for students. This tool helps individuals to find articles from different sources and even books for them to read, buy, or cite.

In international education, search engine optimization creates a meaningful outcome when increasing traffic of viewers (Satish & Sunil, 2012). Since the key words are very similar among all webpages in this area, it is necessary for corporations to work with marketing departments to generate specific key words that can attract more users from their target audience. (Satish & Sunil, 2012).

For example, when students are looking for a specific degree in a specific country, results are given regarding that country. However, when a student is opened to several options in different countries and undecided on what degree to choose, they select only the level of education they are looking for. In this particular case the pool of options is even wider and the company, if not managing properly a search engine, would have less chances on appearing in the first page.

Therefore, if an international education organization is looking to optimize its webpage in a search engine, the first thing they have to make sure is the target they are pursuing, otherwise the efforts will be addressed to different points at the same time without getting the expected result.

Social Networks

Social network is the most popular online communication instrument. It enables people to build a network in order to interact with other people (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). This type of virtual communication is a convenient method for both low and high budget enterprises. Due to its low costs, enterprises are able to promote, inform and be connected with their customers (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013).

The efficiency of social media is due to the wide dissemination of information. It is a platform where a big network of people is connecting by sharing experiences. This is precisely what some international education institutions look for when discussing about social networks within a marketing plan for academic purposes.

Since young people are education consumers, it is critical for international education to use social media to attract and be connected with them. Duggan and Brenner (2012) claim that 83% of people in the range of 18 to 29 years of age, are users of social media and the main ones in disseminate information.

Additionally, student engagement is increasing due to social media. According to Ivala & Gachago (2012) students outside classrooms are designing new ways to learn since devices have turned into learning tools to make daily academic activities easier.

Even though some authors support the use of social media in millennials, especially students, others are afraid of its use with young people. DeBell & Chapman (2006) have shown their concern regarding the use of social media in youth.

They mentioned that Millennials are the main users of Internet and social media. According to their study, the time spent on average of a college student is eight hours a day. Concordantly, Kuh (2001) agrees that college students have concerns regarding the unbalance between the use of Internet and their social and professional life.

Some studies have showed that the time students spend on the Internet or any related social media is impacting the distribution of their activities, turning it into a slow pace journey. Christakis (2011) reported that 70% of young Internet users claimed they spend more time than what they intended to.

Customer Relationship Management

When it comes to efficient practices in international education, the objective is to create student loyalty, and consequently a top of mind to build a network of customers. Therefore, the use of relationship-oriented platforms such as CRM's (Customer Relationship Management) can potentially help consumer loyalty.

A CRM can benefit a company with a synergistic integration as well as a strategic planning (Roland T. Rust, 2006). It provides a technical link between the business and the consumer, so that they can keep in track each other's function. CRM's are based on three key elements of a firm: customer retention, growth of the amount of consumers, and customer acquisition (Reinartz & Venkatesan, 2008).

All those elements work along to create a positive outcome impacting the relationship between consumers and the business.

Effective creation of relationship management

The company needs to identify the right customer as well as his/her lifetime value so that it can allocate properly marketing resources and implement them into a customer relationship (Castronovo & Huang, 2012).

The components of a CRM are linked to generate a mainstream of data useful to provide knowledge. From a dynamic customer database, the information is collected, analyzed, disseminated, and applied to the customer profile. Consequently, with that information, the firm will be able to understand, target and segment the customers to create value and increase their loyalty.

Concordantly, in order to make a CRM strategy work, all structural points in the corporation have to be interconnected (Brito, 2011). It refers to the commitment all stakeholders from a company must have towards the customer-centered strategy. Stakeholders such as CEO's, employees and managers from the different departments need to be trained and motivated to meet the expectations of customers (Mendoza, Marius, Pérez, & Grimán, 2007).

Stakeholders have a critical role in the relationship between the company and their customers (Romero, 2016). Especially the ones whose positions are in frontlines such as customer service, direct sales, admissions and call centers (Garrido-Moreno, Padilla-Meléndez, & Águila-Obra, 2010). All those members are key factors on the efficient labor that will make a CRM strategy work as expected.

The fact of considering those details important when adopting a CRM strategy can be meaningful. In fact, its adoption can result in the achievement of a high competitive advantage (Xu, Yen, Lin, & Chou, 2002). By the time they invest in a CRM strategy, they are adding value for their customers, and therefore, improving their performance. Consequently, it will trigger into higher sales returns and return on investment (Rigo, Pedron, Caldeira, & Araújo, 2016).

CRM for International Education Institutions

Education executives have undertaken initiatives to create a new concept regarding customer relationship. In order to accomplish better results, they already have adopted CRM strategy to increase performance and improve the relationship with potential prospects. However, they have expressed their judgment towards the term.

The topic emerged since they are considering a student as a "customer" (Hilbert, Schönbrunn, & Schmode, 2007), therefore, they are looking to develop Student Relationship Management (SRM) (Seeman & O'Hara, 2006). Student relation helps to have an understanding of students by gathering their knowledge in phases of their interaction such as registration, application, admission, payment and enrolment.

Moreover, SRM is still in development. It is addressed to an education environment where processes and strategies are placed to student needs and academic goals (Trocchia & Finney, 2013). The academia is still working on the implementation of the term within the industry and the recognition of its importance worldwide.

Daradoumis & Rodriguez (2010) claim that the cornerstone of SRM is to develop capabilities within the organization. It has to enable educational institutions to build an understanding of the students and accordingly, increase the retention turnover. Therefore, it will create consumer loyalty and top of mind in the target the company has selected.

This paper will explore those factors mentioned so that the reader can have a better idea on how a company has applied them before. Additionally, it will provide some recommendations for those international education institutions out there that are intending to undertake some mechanisms to improve international education through digital marketing.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to show evidence on how Digital Marketing and its components impact, this research paper is focused on the application of those tools in the British multinational Big Choice Group. The researcher has chosen this corporation along with the P.K. Kannan's Framework for Research in Digital Marketing as a model to show the reader how those tools are currently applied within the company. Moreover, the example was chosen due to the close relation one of the researchers has with the company. Since the researcher is part of the company, she can certify the information discussed in this paper as well as the comparison with the framework that is taken from a Kannan model in a journal.

The research will present a deductive method, as it will provide from a general view, specific information regarding an international education institution. The researcher will analyze the level of influence Digital Marketing has exerted in the company to grow and gather as many students as it can. The conclusion would verify that digital marketing is helping companies to expand their brand to improve the education worldwide.

4. DISCUSSION

According to Kannan (2017), Digital Marketing has become a key tool for the international education. In this paper the researcher will analyze digital technologies touch points applied to the company Big Choice Group

with the Kannan's framework for research in Digital Marketing. Big Choice Group is an educational and career company that provides information, advice and guidance to 15-30 year olds to help them with the "big choices" they need to make in their future studies and employment careers.

As the company grows, it has outspreaded into branches helping students around the world in different areas. The Big Choice, Campus Media, The National Student and the International Student Admissions Service (ISAS Online) are the divisions that Big Choice has launched to the education market as a contribution to the academy.

Originally established in 2014, ISAS is a response to the continuing rise in the number of students who travel outside of their own country to pursue their studies. Since the massive amount of content on the Internet regarding universities, application process and admissions tend to overwhelm students; Big Choice has created ISAS to ease the process in an academic platform. The objective is to help students to find undergraduate, graduate, certificates, and English programs in universities that the company works with.
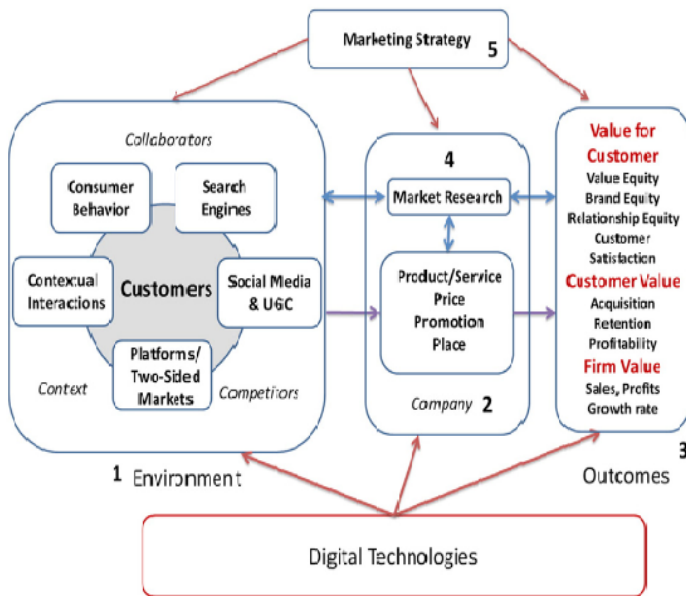

Fig. 1. The Framework for Research in Digital Marketing.

Figure 1. The framework for research and digital marketing

In Figure 1, the author Kannan (2017) implements marketing strategies to their customer behavior. One of the main objectives is to create value for customers. The digital relationships with the online consumer are essential to verify how student will research about where to study abroad.

It's important to recognize that the Big Choice Group service needs to provide customer satisfaction in order to be attractive for the student.

Therefore, to implement these characteristics, the company helps students to get the answers they need quickly and easily. ISAS is a "one stop" advice service specifically for international students, with a team of trained advisors providing free guidance on visas, test preparation, application and admissions advice, program options, appropriate levels of study and more.

In the heart of ISAS, there is a strong belief in education which provides an opportunity to people to change their lives. In an increasing global society, ISAS is committed to supporting international education and the opportunities it provides for the exchange of knowledge and understanding.

According to Kannan (2017), the innovation of search channels is an advantage. Innovation in search engines speed up the performance in the firm to create value. Search engines provide an interactive benefit for the customer. Starting with a service entirely free of charge for students and unlike many education agents there are no sign up fees or hidden charges for the student at any stage.

The International Student Admissions Service is funded solely by education partners. The international education partners are all accredited Colleges and Universities selected from several countries in the world. Each institution is actively seeking to attract international students as part of their strategic internationalization plans and all welcome the opportunity to speak with students from outside of the country in which they are based.

A team of trained international admissions advisors are equipped to provide international students and their parents the kind of customized ad-

vice and guidance they need to make the right decision about where and what to study. Additionally, the service provided includes the follow up process until students' enrollment.

In order to improve the innovation in the company, Big Choice Group has elaborated an innovative platform in which the client interacts with the consumer. Several platforms have emerged in the digital era, those are created to interact with other individual or to connect with a multitude worldwide (Dans, 2009).

Platforms are a useful tool to connect buyers, sellers and firms in order to create two-sided markets (Dans, 2009). Two Sided Markets are two different groups that provide each other with network benefits (Rysman, 2009). Big Choice Group created value primarily by enabling direct interactions between two types of affiliated customers, the student with the universities.

Intercommunication is a key element for the company because they want to achieve interactions between digital technologies and contextual elements. According to Kannan (2017) there are three main interactions a company must have: geography and location, regulation on privacy and regulation against the piracy content.

In order to maintain the structure, Big Choice Group structure is divided by regions. Consequently, for the advisors it is easier to allocate a student to any university worldwide. As a result, the service is fast and efficient.

The official webpage of the company has a privacy policy in which they collect information online and offline. In order to protect the student there is Data Protection Act. Big Choice Group uses information that the student provides (individual and aggregate) to better design the website and to improve the marketing strategy and their service.

Big Choice Group has its own search webpages: Study Overseas, International Graduate, MBA Courses, Science, Engineering & Technology and Medical Colleges. In all these websites there is a regulation against

piracy content. In the bottom of each website there is a registration trademark which is an intellectual property.

These three main interactions are covered by the company for a better service for the clients. In the end, Big Choice Group would improve their international education service by protecting their business.

Agenda for future Research

Marketing Insights

Big Choice is working on improving the concept of Marketing Intelligence within the corporate structure and business. The company is trying to emphasize behavioral matters as well as cognitive and attitudinal ones of customers. Consequently, the objective is to create a link in which consumers can turn themselves into stepping-stones in favor of the brand and the product the company delivers.

Costs

Every company looks for saving costs in the long term. Digital Marketing allows every company to save costs by replacing the current ones with digital platforms of promotion and sale.

More than the tangible costs currently incurred, everything is about adding some other costs such as transaction costs, learning costs, emotional costs, loyalty in customers, discounts.

Improving cultural studies to allocate the resources and efforts properly. Since the International Education Market is broad and diverse, so is the business approach. Therefore, to concentrate the same efforts in all countries and students is the biggest mistake since the business is most of the time about managing cultural factors from people around the world.

5. CONCLUSION

The key objective in this research paper is the implementation and impact of digital marketing on international education. According to Kan-

nan (2017), the author has developed and proposed a framework, which highlights touch points regarding the marketing process as well as in the marketing strategy process where digital relationship within a company plays a key role. Using as an example the British company Big Choice Group, the researcher has organized and reviewed these touch points in fields such as environment, marketing outcomes and company impact.

To illustrate the impact of digital marketing in Big Choice Group, the researcher used a case study in which she compares the digital innovations within the structure of the company. Concluding that innovations are improving the international education system and as a consequence a better interaction with students worldwide. In fact, the company has elaborated a CRM that is user friendly to their customers. Finally, Big Choice Group main objective has become to be a pioneer in international education.

Recommendations

- The company should adapt their web sites design to their different target countries. According to Kannan (2017) the consumer behavior is affected by their traditions and values. The consumer perceives and adapts to their culture in which it affects directly their brand loyalty.

- The company should interact with the contextual elements such as geography and location with digital technology. They need to implement in their CRM the different regions in which they work to build an easier platform for the costumer to interact with the client.

- Improve the customer satisfaction by expanding educational agreements with universities worldwide, so that the advisors can diversify the portfolio of institutions and increase the options to offer.

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