

Special issue introduction: online relationship marketing

Overview

In this special issue, the *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* presents a series of papers associated with Online Relationship Marketing. Relationship marketing involves the development and maintenance of strong relationships with customers and other stakeholders that result in customer loyalty and firm profitability (Bolton *et al.*, 2004; Firdaus and Kanyan, 2014; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Oly Ndubisi, 2007). It stresses the importance of continuous interactions between the seller and the buyer in order to develop a long-term relationship (Jain *et al.*, 2017; Palmatier *et al.*, 2006). However, the impact of the internet and technology on relationship marketing are often not adequately investigated, leading to overstated hypothetical predictions of its future potential (Hart *et al.*, 2000). In many circumstances, the resources devoted to developing and retaining the e-platforms are fruitless (Gan *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, it is imperative to advance our knowledge of relationship marketing in the online environment (Bilgihan and Bujisic, 2015). The special issue includes a synthesised, state-of-the-art overview of online relationship marketing research as well as six papers covering three main themes: “personalised relationships, value-added benefits, and social media as emerging sales and distribution channels”.

First, “Online relationship marketing: evolution and theoretical insights into online relationship marketing”, a systematic literature review paper by Thaichon (2017), opens this “online relationship marketing” special issue. The paper examines three areas pertinent to online relationship marketing: first, the evolution of online relationship marketing from pre-1990s to the present, which offers a temporal snapshot of changes and an overview of the critical components that make up the structure of online relationship marketing; second, key theoretical perspectives underlying the development of online relationship marketing; and third, empirical insights into online relationship marketing. The paper identifies future research areas, including multiple layers of interactions, use of new technologies and platforms, and the dark side of online communications.

The first theme, “personalised relationships”, involves the use of content marketing to build a relationship with customers in social media. It is investigated in the study “Online relationship marketing through content creation and curation” by Abid *et al.* (2020). The paper examines the role of various content cues and characteristics in relation to relationship quality. The findings recommend the use of peripheral cues rather than the central route. In addition, interactive and lengthy content might not be effective while curation of images and videos is well received. In addition, “Building relationships through customer engagement in Facebook brand pages” by de Silva (2020) provides insights into the nature of customer engagement in Facebook brand pages. It demonstrates that user engagement mediates the relationships between customers’ specific motives (information, remuneration, social interaction and personal identity) and Facebook brand page relationship outcomes.

The second theme, “value-added benefits”, reflects the provision of additional value to customers through online incentives and types of treatment. The research “Customer engagement and co-created value in social media” by Quach *et al.* (2020) demonstrate that the relationship between customer participation and customer engagement is fully mediated by co-created value. It is also interesting to note when an external reward is offered to customers, privacy concern has a significant and negative effect on customer engagement. Furthermore, the paper “Revisiting the role of relationship benefits in online retail” by Soni (2020) investigates the moderating role of relationship benefits (special treatment benefits



and confidence benefits) on relationship quality and word of mouth for online retailers. The study also identifies the conditions in which special treatment benefits and confidence benefits successfully moderate the effect of customer satisfaction on developing relationship quality and eliciting positive word of mouth.

Finally, the theme of “social media as emerging sales and distribution channels” is discussed in “What S-commerce implies? Repurchase intention and its antecedents” by Lim *et al.* (2020). Social commerce (s-commerce) is defined as the “forms of internet-based social media that allow people to participate actively in marketing and selling of products in online marketplaces and communities” (Stephen and Toubia, 2010, p. 15). Lim *et al.* (2020) reveal that social commerce cues (i.e. trust, compatibility, reliability and responsiveness) have a positive effect on customer engagement, which in turn leads to repurchase intention among Gen-Y. The last paper of the special issue is “The impact of firms’ social ties with customers on dual-channel supply chains” by Wei *et al.* (2020). This study aims to examine pricing, information service provision and channel strategies of firms who sell products through social media. The findings showed that in addition to the relationship between firms and customers, the peer relationship among customers also impacts the supply chain performance.

Lastly, we would like to extend our gratitude to all authors who submitted their work to this special issue “Online Relationship Marketing” of the *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*. Special thanks go to the reviewers who offered their precious time and expertise in reviewing the papers submitted to this issue. We have received close to 40 papers for review but only chose seven following a rigorous review process to include in the special issue.

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- Thaichon, P. (2017), "Consumer socialization process: The role of age in children's online shopping behaviour", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 34, January, pp. 38-47.

Further reading

- Jensen, J.M. and Wagner, C. (2018), "A cross-national comparison of millennial consumers' initial trust towards an e-travel website", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 36 No. 3, pp. 318-333.