

## The Digitalization of Communications: Towards Content Marketing

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We live in a highly evolving world, where old traditions are replaced by new ones by the minute. In such a vibrant world, it only makes sense that media, which is by definition prone to change, would have to adapt to new innovations. While still a handsome amount of people purchase newspapers daily, most of the population in the world prefers to read it on their tablet computer or smartphones. Most of these people thought they would never trade paperback books for e-books, or writing letter for e-mails either. The digital revolution has taken the world by storm since the invention of the computer, and it looks like it is here to stay. For instance, according to August 2015 data, the amount of active internet users is almost half of the world's population, 3,175 billion. Similarly, the number of active users in social media is also quite high, 2,206 billion, which is about 30% of the world's population. People who use internet with the intent of using social media has risen to 1,925 billion. The fact that social media users increased by 176 million in the previous year indicates that these data from a few months ago could have easily changed by now (Regan, 2015). According to 2015 TÜİK data, Turkish households that have access to internet equals 69,5%. From the households that have internet access, 58,7% of those connected to internet via mobile connection, and 37,4% has connected via cable services. According to the same data, 96,8% of households had cell phones or smartphones, 25,2% had desktop computers, 43,2% had laptops and 20,9% had TV's that could connect to internet (TÜİK, 2016).

In the light of these statistics if we remember Mc Luhan; the world has shrunk even further with internet than what McLuhan predicted with his "global village" theory. People and institutions at the other end of the world have become acces-

sible with one click. McLuhan also states that human nature changes in electronic media. Indeed today, with the widespread use of smartphones, e-mail access has been taken away from computers' monopoly and applications such as Viber and Whatsapp have brought a new dimension to electronic correspondence, and changed human nature. Nowadays, people get their news on social media, react on social media and therefore live and consume on social media.

### **The Digitalization of Marketing Communications**

The charm of the digital environment which affects people's life styles has without a doubt also affected the marketing and communication strategies of businesses and converted them to digital. As for global public relations firms, they have added a new field of study, "communication for generation Y" to their existing fields. This explains the spreading speed of the internet and the increasingly digital marketing communication strategies. This also points out the importance and presence of digital communications.

With everything becoming increasingly digitalized, companies have started not only to form departments dedicated to the area, but also to base their marketing communication strategies on social media and how it can be manipulated to market products to end users. Since we are quick to adapt to new innovations, most consumers have already stopped spending their precious time looking through brand adverts when reading a magazine. They are no longer interested in what the witty slogan on a billboard has to say. They want everything on-the-go, online, where they can access it from their phones at any time of day. Using the internet while marketing products also makes the company more accessible in the eyes of some consumers. "The key of digital marketing is to allow an enterprise's advertising information being highly exposed" (Maw-Liann et al., 2015). Being exposed to a company's products—that are carefully selected and put on consumers' feeds through various algorithms—every time they scroll through their Instagram feed gives the end users a sense of connectedness with the company.

The emergence of digital marketing brought new ways of thinking into the marketing industry. It was more than just selling goods to buyers now. The companies had to find a way to interact with their consumers. Since the digitalization era came by, the importance of social media was rapidly on the rise, and many businesses relied on that to get inside the consumers' networks, which are the forming blocks of social media. Through the use of different social media outlets like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat, even the most "unattainable" products were suddenly in buyers' everyday lives. Every time they log on, they

constantly see the new products on their feed, and after some time, they feel like the products is no longer mere luxury, but a necessity. Additionally, when we take into account the fact that 64 billion Whatsapp messages are delivered through internet, the correlation between communication and internet becomes more evident (Öncel, 2014).

This is what manufacturers lean on nowadays. They infiltrate personal networks through social media, pop up on Instagram's "who to follow" suggestions and as soon as a consumer clicks the "follow" button, he or she is instantly exposed to marketing messages by the company approximately every three hours. Once the company is in the buyer's personal network, it is mostly word-of-mouth from thereon. If the prospective buyer "likes" one of the company's posts, their friends instantly know about it, which results in a few of them looking through, and possibly following, the company's page.

### **The Change Towards Content Marketing**

Because of these advances in the marketing world, companies must always find new ways to stay competitive. Nowadays, most companies rely on content marketing, which is a subcategory of digital marketing, and can be defined as: "... the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience- with the objective of driving profitable customer action" by the Content Marketing Institute in 2015 (quoted in Patruti Baltes, 2015). Therefore, by establishing a strong two-way communication with the customers, companies are establishing trust between their brand and their target audience, which translates into profits. If a company succeeds in developing content marketing and distributing it to its target segment, that company will be reaching to customers the way they want to be reached. And since the modern buyer want some sort of interaction with the company, social media provides useful. Being able to "comment" on the company's products on their Instagram and Facebook pages, watching behind-the-scenes action showing how the product is made or how things are backstage, the customers feel included in the process, and not just like means of making profit in the eyes of the company.

"According to the statistics provided by the Content Marketing Institute, the importance of content marketing is growing, as 70% of B2B [business to business] marketers are creating more content than they did one year ago (Patruti Baltes, 2015). The success of content marketing relies heavily on the fact that its aim is not to sell products, but to connect and establish a form of communication and connection with the target segment of the company. By not trying to sell, but

to inform, content marketing gives the 21<sup>st</sup> century consumer exactly what he or she needs: a sense of belonging in a growingly isolationist global culture. By connecting with the customer emotionally, content marketing gains the loyalty of that customer for the brand. Content Marketing Institute suggests “the motivation behind content marketing is the belief that educating the customer results in the brand’s recognition as a thought leader and industry expert” (quoted in Patrutiu Baltes, 2015). A reason for this may be due to the way the brand establishes valuable connections with its target audience and informs them about life in the company, upcoming projects, wishes them good morning by morning posts rather than just posting about sales, promotions and bestsellers. Patrutiu Baltes argues that “to be relevant to your audience and create a powerful brand you must win their trust and admiration. With the creation of valuable content, you build interest that transforms into lasting relationships” (2015).

The innovation and evolution of the Internet has created a new marketplace for consumers, and marketers must take advantage of this new marketplace to the fullest extent to get ahead of competition. “The rise of this consumer marketplace is clearly aligned with the evolutionary progress of the marketing function from a mass-market model to more interactive personalization of goods, services, and interactions. With interactive media, marketers can dynamically deliver personalized services and content, in real time, one consumer at a time” (McQuade et al., 1996). Since we have established that customers want to be included and feel like they are part of a group rather than mere bank accounts, being able to communicate with the company directly gives an enormous advantage at the benefit of the firm. It can not only make both current and prospective customers feel welcome, but also tailor what each customer will see according to their unique qualities using a carefully crafted algorithm.

It can safely be assumed that the focus in marketing will continue to shift from a firm-oriented mass marketing strategy to one that targets the individual and tries to form long-lasting relationships with him or her rather than just sell products. “Therefore, a digital marketing strategy cannot be successful without having a quality content marketing ... To be relevant to your audience and create a powerful brand you must win their trust and admiration. With the creation of valuable content you build interest that transforms into lasting relationships” (Patrutiu Baltes, 2015). With the digitalization of marketing, firms must strive to acquire a more predominant presence online with webpages and in the form of social media. The Internet age has created a new market, and it is everything the consumers have been asking for. With the help of content marketing, companies now will have greater ease than ever in establishing trusting and long-lasting relationships with their targeted customers by giving them exactly what they want, and how they want it, which in turn will be transformed into profits for the firm

in the long run. While content marketing does not get a firm instant profits, it does get a firm brand loyalty, which will not cease to exist so quickly. This brings public relations into minds, since it is one of the main actors of the marketing communications as it serves to build and maintain trust, loyalty and long-lasting relationships between the brand and the consumer.

Digital communication not only affects consumer behavior, but also marketing and marketing communication strategies. Since digital communication is very much involved in consumers' everyday lives and affects consumer behavior, it also directs companies to bring their customers together with the social networks of the global village. In other words, with the changing style of communication, it is not only the consumption environment that is affected, but also marketing communication strategies and relationships with brands. People who surf the web can suddenly fall prey to content marketing and turn into digital consumers (Tüzel Uraltaş, 2016). With this in mind, it can also be argued that public relations will continue to be the star of marketing communications to reach the digital consumer because of its suitable nature for content marketing.

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