
Editorial: Technology, marketing and consumer orientation

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In recent years, marketing as a function has evolved from being purely customer driven to value driven. Value centric approach entails engaging customers in a long-term relationship with the firm and enhancing the service and product experience. In delivering value to final customers, firms are relying on their suppliers, intermediaries, and other channel members. The competitive advantage of firms lies in its appropriate management of relationships spanning their value chain. Technology has played an important role in the management of relationships. It has reduced the physical distance between the customers and firms.

Technology is being deployed to improve relationships with customers by increasing their participation in the marketing process. It improves functionality through alignment and integration of different business processes. It can facilitate increased customer participation and interaction (Akinci et al., 2004). However, in many developing countries, customers are skeptical about using technology in interacting with firms. The concerns centre on trust, credibility, and usage patterns. Ioannou and Zolkiewski (2009) posit that customers are accustomed to face-to-face interactions and technology may not offer similar service experience. The facelessness nature of technology generates fear and apprehensions. The challenge lies in leveraging technology for improving customer relationship and interaction. The apprehensions can be tackled by creating platforms that involve customers at different touch points with the firm and instil trust about the service. Most customers are wary of technology as it believed to complicate financial transactions (Sayar and Wolfe, 2007; Acharya et al., 2008). Trust with the service provider is an integral part of relationship. Security concerns related to financial transactions in the online medium influence customers' attitude and adoption behaviour (Sathye, 1999). Technology use would enhance service quality, trust, information availability, service recovery, and flexibility (Howcroft et al., 2002; Loonam and O'Loughlin, 2008). Value centric approach should not only focus on managing customers expectations but design service and products that instil confidence.

Technology can help in building long-term sustainable relationship with customers by establishing high-quality communication (Kimiloğlu and Zaralı, 2009) leading to

profitability, enhanced customer satisfaction and reduced marketing costs. Alignment of backend operations with front-end customer facing processes would help firms in providing efficient services. The idea is not to look at technology as a tool facilitating customer service, but as a strategic advantage that aligns all business process. Alignment of business process spanning intra-organisation and inter-organisation functions is important. Companies like Dell, Ford, Toyota, and Mercedes have benefited by involving intermediaries, suppliers and customers in the marketing and production functions. Involvement of vendors, suppliers, service providers, and intermediaries enhances firms' capability to innovate. Increased use of internet in marketing has changed the way business is being viewed by different stakeholders of the firm. Internet is seen as an interactive medium which facilitates participation across different levels. Suppliers and customers can be involved in different processes of the firm. Interactivity, accessibility, ease of use, and compatibility are key dimensions of technology.

That brings us to another interesting by-product of technology: social networks. Social networking forums are popular medium for building relationships beyond the restrictions of physical presence (Boyd, 2004; Lewis, 2008; Richardson and Hessey, 2009). It has transformed the sociability dimension of customer-firm interface. It has also helped firms in interacting with large number of customers at one time, viral marketing initiatives, and advertising. Preece (2006) posits that social interaction websites offer the feasibility to users to interact online with other users and share their views about firms' products and services. Technology has created web-based space that enables friendly, socially interactions and help users in sharing and retrieving information (Sadeh, 2007). These forums are safe havens where members can escape from their hectic life schedules. The benefits are manifold; these social networking sites bring people together under a common interest, objective or passion. They provide an environment where people can share their feelings, passions and hobbies unrestricted by constraints of time and physical presence. It enhances customer experiences as users can customise the websites according to their preferences.

This issue contains five academic papers touching on the issues discussed above. We hope that the papers presented in this issue would be of interest to academics and researcher and they would be able contribute to the existing literature on business competition and related subjected and provide directions to the future research on the subject.

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