

Digital touch points - The secret sauce

It is not about the brand's digital advertising blitzkrieg, that bombards the consumer. Those consumer -digital touch points, that add value are the ones that matter, both to the consumer and the respective brand, the author writes...

S. Ramesh Kumar

Digital- brand connections are making use of AI, Machine learning and preferential tracking to customize chatbot conversations with consumers. These are important developments that can revolutionize strategic thinking on brand decisions. However, digital modes in marketing would do well to address contextual consumer problems, that could strengthen the consumer -brand bond , which is the ultimate dream of any digital marketing effort.

“Unlocking Digital for Bharat: \$50 Billion Opportunity” , a report from the collaborative network of Omidyar , Bain & Co and Google, reports that a significant number of online purchasers drop off due to the online purchasing experience and product return factors among other factors cited by the report. A report by WAT Consult , a Dentsu , India agency says that a significant cross sections of consumers in India , report that chatbots do not answer their questions precisely . The article delves on a few contexts to illustrate the need for brands to be contextually digital.

Product usage

Do consumers read the product usage catalogue, supplied with the product offering of the brand ?

Given the accessibility of apps and the younger z generation as the target segment, there are both old and new categories, that are being constantly ordered online by the segments. It can be a laptop (traditional category after almost two decades in the Indian context) or a water floss (a new kind of category in the Indian contexts). It can even be a ready to cook fast food. Product usage in the appropriate manner has far reaching implications. It provides the desired functional (or sensual in the case of the fast food example) outcome and hence it has an impact on consumer satisfaction. But this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Bad usage from the consumer's end can create frustration for the consumer and the immediate response of the consumer will be towards the brand rather than an introspection on reading up the product catalogue. This results in online evaluation of the brand and it is a well established fact that prospective buyers get an online feedback from closely associated ties before buying the product offering .

Also, such dissatisfaction shows in reviews , especially the ones that are perceived as credible reviews . if the brand is bought from Amazon , it the reviews and the respective star rating will show up on the same website. The company perhaps would be doing its best and for no fault of the brand , it may be attracting flak.

Implication

How should the brand encourage consumers to read up the brand's catalogue and, also ensure that the consumer gets back in case of doubts, when the purchase is made online?

It is to be noted that several buyers may refer to online videos /You tube for product demonstration It is in the interest of the brand to provide an authentic product usage visual demonstration at the point of online purchase as there is a contextual incentive for the buyer, to take, a look at the usage.

There may be a similar context if one considers the registration process of warranty and most consumers may not go through the process of registering the purchase within a period of time as stipulated by the brand.

Touch points with chatbots

With the increasing usage of chatbots to answer consumer queries, several brands have introduced chatbots (can be used in many ways) and some of them may be doing well too. Can there be an online mechanism to provide assistance , to consumers who may not find the answer to a specific question that may not be answered by the combination of question and answers powering the respective chatbot.

Also, it is to be noted that given the evolving consumer base with respect to technology usage at retail settings. There needs to be an inclusive approach towards diverse consumers who may be several stages of being comfortable with the usage of technology.

Let is imagine a consumer making a call to urgently transact with the bank with respect to his or her account and the chatbot not being up to providing the answers required. Even if this happens during working hours , the bank may not bother as the chatbot is supposed to take care of it ; and this is a fundamental step , not a delight oriented initiative!

Implication

When the world is talking about complex digital initiatives, the brand may not even fulfill a basic necessity.

The viral, that matters

There is research published in Harvard on the science of viral /digital spread / posting of ad links. The research is about the kind of personality that will be poised towards forwarding ads of brands. Ego- centric and extraverted individuals are more prone to forward the ads of brands. Ego centric individuals would like to enhance their status among the e group/s and would like to be perceived as connected, have a sense of taste and be seen as media savvy.

There may be other factors associated with the spreading of ad links, but the factor associated with one's personality is important as it can be accessed through a variety of online analytics and consumers' psychographic information (includes AI tools available), associated with the brand and the digital footprints.

The Indian cultural context with its nuances also provides interesting challenges to the analyst in such a context.

Implication

Maximum mileage of a viral message in favor of the brand, need to be achieved.

Context, consumer behavior and consumer centric digital initiatives are likely to be the value-adding differentiators in the game of digital marketing.

Brand Equity is built on every digital touch point that matters to the brand.

The author is professor of marketing at IIM Bangalore. Views expressed are personal.