Chapter 12

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Marketing Strategies in the Airline Industry

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the leading sectors based on other people’s views and comments found on the Internet. Prior to deciding where they would like to go, individuals obtain information about the travel agencies they will use, the hotels they will stay at and the regions they would like to visit, plus the views and experiences of others in terms of these issues, which are largely shared via social media environments. Accordingly, it has become a necessity for establishments to follow the main social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on, and develop their goods and services in line with the comments shared on these platforms. In this study, how national and international airline companies implement the 4Ps of marketing (product, price, place, promotion) in social media environments is investigated through examples and analysed through data obtained via interviews.

INTRODUCTION

With the adaptation of the Internet to mobile devices, social media applications have become a part of smart phones and tablets. Today, social media has come to be positioned as a separate marketing tool from the Internet. Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2004) stated that social media is consumer-gererated and that various online information sources, which are created, are employed by users to educate one another on other brands, services and various issues (as cited in Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti (2004) stated that although social media has adapted to the majority of users, social media applications have organizational purposes that take priority, such as marketing and information management.
Leonardi and Et al. define social media as external parties that enable communication with customers, salespeople and the public through various platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfeld, 2013). In the digital world, users follow brands they like and are interested in, and that the groups formed by these brands come together on a common platform in support of the brands. For instance, there are groups that are interested in certain brands and brand communities, such as Harley Davidson or Volkswagen, which have been created on the Internet environment. Kucuk (2009) stated that these new customer groups, defined as brand communities, put pressure on the brand to re-evaluate brand management, which has been grounded in basic disciplines for years (as cited in Quinton, 2013). Jevons et al. (2005) stated that brands are no longer passive agents, and that through consumers who provide input via online brand communities, in particular, brands exist as a partially independent from the market (as cited in Quinton, 2013).

According to a study conducted by Tomoson Research Institute (2015), consumers are increasingly using the Internet and social media to inform their preferences and purchases because of the influencers. In light of these results, it can be stated that the importance of social media in the service sector will gradually increase. Establishments within the service sector are able to reach more people through social media. Customers make great use of the Internet and social media in order to conduct research, evaluate alternatives, select/purchase products and broadcast behaviours displayed after purchasing in the area of airline transportation, which constitutes an important part in the service sector.

In this study, social media will be investigated through the lens of the historical development of marketing, and then evaluated in its use in airline marketing. In the section entitled Main Focus of the Chapter, we will evaluate how Turkish Airlines and Emirates use social media; their social media accounts and websites will be analysed and compared to the interviews conducted with the social media managers of both airline companies. Based on our analysis, we will evaluate how Emirates and Turkish Airlines use the 4P elements of marketing (product, price, place, promotion) in their social media marketing. According to our analysis, both airline firms use all product elements in order to improve their services. In addition, they use the place element to make sales through the Internet and the price element to give information about ticket prices. These airline firms also use another 4P component, promotion, to effectively advertise and promote products on social media platforms.

BACKGROUND

For establishments in competitive environments, which are shaped by information communication technologies, marketing is as important as the quality of goods and services. Today, with developments in the areas of industry, science and technology, the competition environment has increased even more. It has become a necessity to analyse the target groups and understand rivals in this competition environment. This entails the planning of marketing that uses new scientific methods. McCarthy created the concept of the 4Ps in order to show how to begin marketing during this process of change and within the overbearing competition environment; and through which stages it should move and be promoted (as cited in Anderson & Taylor, 1995:5) McCarthy defined the 4Ps as price, product, place and promotion.

Constantinides (2006) stated that the original marketing mix is based on the 12 controllable marketing elements (goods, pricing, branding, distribution channels, individual sales, advertising, promotion, packaging, exhibition, service, physical distribution, data collection and analysis), which have been defined