THE EFFECTS OF INTERACTIVE MARKETING ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOR: CASE STUDY OF NATIONAL ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between interactive marketing and customer engagement behavior in education and training service in digital age. A survey of 480 students of National Economics Univeristy was conducted in March 2021 to collect the data. Regression model is used to test the hypothesis on the relationship between four dimensions of customer engagement behavior - augmentting behavior (AG), co-development (CO), influencing behavior (INF), mobilizing behavior (MB) and interactive marketing activities. Research results confirm that interactive marketing has a positive impact on engagement behavior of students with the university. Some managerial implications are also discussed in the paper.

Keywords: *Interactive marketing, Customer engagement, customer engagement behavior*

1. Introduction

Recent years, the fact that a lot of new universities are continuously established or upgraded from collegge has led to intense competion among universities in recruiting students. Frequent topics in articles published every year is about enrollment activities and how much obtacle numbers of universities have to face in recruiting enough annual student quota. Universities need students to survive and develop like any business needs customers. Hence, whether the relationship between the university and students is the relationship between businesses and customers? This is such an interesting topic that if you scroll through the forums or search on the topic on Google, you can easily see the controversial opinions.

The arguing topics are often around the issue of how to balance between attracting students, ensuring enrollment targets for the school and the quality of student input, between ensuring training quality, the role of the teacher and the role of students and their satisfaction. These controversies may never come to an end because of different approaches. However the answer to the question whether universities need to understand market needs, understand student needs, and find ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning is always Yes, especially under the marketing approach.

The digital era leads to great changes in all human activities thanks to the internet of things (IOTs), artificial intelligence (AI) and other modern digital technologies. The public not only receives information about brands, also known as one-way marketing messages, but they also actively interact and express their personal views on the brand. This is the foundation for the birth of interactive marketing. Websites, peer-to-peer tools like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, eBay, Tiktok or information search sites like Google are growing like never before. Besides, mobile platforms give people the opportunity to connect widely with more people anywhere any time. Accordingly, brands increasingly utilize these tools in the implementation of interactive marketing activities. In this rapidly developing digital technology context, universities as the education and training service providers are not out of the race in updating 4.0 technologies in managing and operating of all school activities to achieve their goals in recruitment, training quality improvement as well as brand development.

One of the benefits that interactive marketing can bring is to create a connection between the students and the university, therefore helping the universty improve their position and brand image as well as improve the service quality in the most accurate way. The fact is that alot of universities have been updating digital technology and exploiting the digital platforms as online channels to interact with their students. Accordingly, student satisfaction and engagement with the school are of great importance besides training results.

All of the above transformation require investment in facilities, adjustment in the organization structure and efforts of each staff and lecturer to create effective interaction with students. So in fact, how the students perceive and evaluate the factors that make up the service quality from the perspective of interactive marketing and how these factors affect their engagement to the university? This study was conducted to measure the influence of interactive marketing activities on student engagement behavior. In which, interactive marketing activities are measured through students' assessment on interactive marketing activities that NEU has implemented.

2. Literature review

Interactive digital marketing

The term interactive marketing have been used in a lot of research papers in the US before, but it is often understood in the form of relationship marketing, internet marketing or data-based marketing. According to Blattberg and Deighton (1991), interactive marketing is the exchange of information between each other. During the interaction, needs, interests, and abilities are gradually identified. Such relationships are established over a period of time which helps the company accumulate a database that brings benefits to the company. Ch. Gronroos (1995) defines interactive marketing as managing the relationship between buyers and sellers. Later on, interactive marketing is a defined as the combination of conventional marketing planning with methods of resolving relationships between consumers, including technology to allow the establishment of common interactive relationships. and attract new consumers (T. Kendrick and K. Fletcher, 1999).

It can be concluded that interactive marketing is a form of marketing in which customers and businesses exchange and discuss information with each other through a digital environment to establish a relationship. close relationship between the parties.

Characteristics of interactive marketing

By its very nature, interactive marketing plays an important role in the development and success of businesses. Interactive marketing is different from other previously defined terms such as online marketing or relationship marketing because it shows through the following aspects:

- A two-way dialogue between businesses and customers. Unlike traditional marketing, interactive marketing is about creating a two-way dialogue between businesses and customers. Based on customers feedback and preferences, marketers can come up with more appropriate marketing messages so that they can easily lead customers.

- Lower cost than traditional marketing. It can be said that doing online advertising is significantly less expensive than television, print or radio advertising and often generates a higher rate of return.

- Enterprises can implement interactive marketing programs through digital communication channels. Instead of just watching ads on TV within 20 seconds, nowadays, customers can learn about the product and brand by a predefined route that the business provides, which are the website, email, Mobile / SMS, Game, etc. Forum,…

- The measuring indicators and tools. Some authors emphasize that measureability is an important aspect of interactive marketing as companies can quantify the feedback from communication efforts (Morwitz and Schmittlein, 1998). Or because of its measureability, accuracy, customizability, personalization, and easy targeting (Trappey III & Woodside 2005) that interactive digital marketing is arguably one of the most effective tools for marketers (Radzeviciute & Sliburyte 2005).

- Search engines are the most popular form of interactive marketing. When customers enter keywords into the search window of a search engine, ads will be displayed based on their search terms.

- The source of information through the interaction that customers leave is large. It is also called digital footprints. Their demographics and personal preferences are all revealed through their online behavior. This allows companies to track and store this data for future use in marketing campaigns. The more relevant marketing is to the immediate wants and needs of customers, the more likely it is to make a sale.

The role and importance of interactive marketing

Although interactive marketing is classified as a form of direct marketing, its widespread use makes it a stand-alone form of marketing. Interactive marketing plays an important role in spreading brand image information on the online space, besides it saves costs as well as a number of other benefits as follows:

Firstly, the sales conversion rate becomes higher. A successful interactive marketing strategy is one that helps convert consumers from receivers to buyers. Unlike traditional TV and radio advertising, interactive marketing tools give audiences the opportunity to buy on the spot, which in turn also makes it easier for potential customers to reach your business.

Secondly, interactive marketing will help businesses save costs. Costs including hiring, payroll, shipping and printing will be reduced when the technical tools of interactive marketing are leveraged on e-commerce sites or online stores, The cost for warehouses, showrooms, sales reps and cashiers also reduces because transactions are done online. In addition, printed publications will also be replaced by electronic publications and this information can easily be updated more frequently.

Thirdly is the ability to engage with customers. Many interactive marketing tools allow merchants to engage with their target audience and provide a novel shopping experience that also allows them to learn more about their customers. Experiences such as letting customers express their own personality and preferences for the company's products will also make customers feel more connected to the business, thereby increasing their loyalty.

Fourthly is the ability to attract new interactions. When there is a connecting of existing customers, they will share their information and interests in the business with friends or others. This helps businesses attract new interactions, thereby increasing the number of potential customers in the future.

Finally, through interactive marketing, businesses can receive feedback that will be an important factor in the growth of the company. This is explained by the fact that if the customer has direct feedback, the business will receive different multi-dimensional

information about the business. It can also help businesses to change more positively or have good suggestion in the next marketing campaigns. Even without direct feedback, businesses can measure the effectiveness of their interactive marketing activities by analyzing other metrics such as how many times an ads has been read and shared, the period of time spent on reading a PR articles or website, etc.

Elements of interactive marketing

Most of the research papers on interactive marketing often consider the elements of interactive marketing like those in service marketing or relationship marketing. Baron and Harris (2003) presented seven key elements of relationship marketing as: level of trust between two parties, level of commitment to the relationship, long-term relationship, communication channel, service personalization, service quality, customer satisfaction and quality commitment. Ndubisi (2006) in the study of the influence of gender on loyalty under the relationship marketing approach also proposed four main factors underpinning relationship marketing such as trust, commitment, communication, handling complaints. Dushyenthan et al. (2012) in the study on the influence of interactive marketing on customer satisfaction, provided 7 main factors showing the influence of interactive marketing: Trust, Relationship Commitment, Quality. Staff, Atmosphere quality, Familiarity, Service personalization, Complaint handling.

In this study with the context of the digital interactive environment in the university education services, the authors selected and evaluated 6 main elements of the university's interactive marketing: Facilities, Service Quality, Trust, Responsibility, Relationship Commitment, Complain Handling. All these factors are built on scales associated with the digital technology environment: the facilities are online technology infrastructure such as wifi, software, online interactive channels; interactive services and activities are provided and implemented through online channels such as websites, social networks, online learning systems, email…

Customer engagement (CE) and customer engagement behavior (CEB)

Customer engagement has been attracting considerable attention among practitioners as well as academicians in recent years. Customer engagement is a concept that is being explored as a tool to facilitate predictive power of customer behaviour including loyalty and referrals (Brodie et al., 2011; Calder et al., 2009; Pham and Avnet, 2009). Scholars have conceptualized engagement in varied forms including consumer and customer engagement (Bolton, 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010), customer-brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014), community engagement (Brodie et al., 2013), customer-medium engagement (Calder et al, 2009; Kim et al., 2013), engagement for co-creation (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Sawhney et al., 2005) etc. Such varied conceptualizations reflect the

evolving state of the construct. It also reflects on the growing interest among scholars from different viewpoints.

The latest common cited definition is from Hollebeek, Srivastava và Chen (2019). They defined customer engagement as a customer's motivationally driven, volitional investment of focal operant resources (including cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social knowledge and skills), and operand resources (e.g., equipment) into brand in- teractions in service systems. Accordingly, customer engagement has the following characteristics:

- more than just buying behavior

- showing the customer's long-term and intimate relationship in cognitive, behavioral and emotional aspects

- presenting the customer's willingness to share physical and operand resources in interaction with the business

- a multi-stage process that is monitored and measured

- ease of access thanks to digital technology

Up to this time, customer engagement has primarily been examined from four broad perspectives: (i) as a behavioural manifestation, originating from work conducted by van Doorn et al. (2010); (ii) as a psychological state as per Brodie et al. (2011); (iii) as a disposition to act (e.g. Storbacka et al. 2016); and (iv) as a process including several steps or stages of the customer decision making process (e.g. Maslowska et al. 2016). Literature focusing on behavioural manifestations commonly refers to customer engagement behaviours (CEB). Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) specify CEB as behaviours that "go beyond transactions and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers". While Kumar et al. (2010) argue that CE should include transactional behaviours, most scholars (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Bijmolt et al. 2018, Jaakkola and Alexander 2014; Verleye et al. 2014) concur with van Doorn et al. (2010) that customer engagement only involves behaviour that extends beyond transactions, and thus beyond purchase. Since behaviours can be easily observed and measured, this study also focuses on the behavioral manifestations of CE.

Jaakkohla and Alexander (2014) identified four types of CEB as follows:

- Augmenting behavior: Customer uses resources to expand/add value to product/business (for example, discovering new ways to create a product/service)

- Co-developing behavior: Customer contributes resources to the development of the product/business (e.g. supporting the development of an idea such as testing a new product)

– Influencing behavior: Customer influences other people's perceptions, preferences and perceptions of the business (e.g. blogging about experiences, introducing hotels)

– Mobilizing behavior: Customer uses one's own resources to entice and mobilize others to participate in business-oriented activities (e.g. product boycott)

This study used this classification to establish scales for customer engagement behavior factor in the research model.

3. Method

Study site

The field study was conducted in National Economics University (NEU) and the research population chosen was that of NEU students. NEU has enthusiastically taken to online activities and moved into the digital age aggressively to keep up with that of Vietnam in general.

According to the report on "Mobile Application Market 2021" released by Appota, Vietnam has about 70% of the population using mobile phones, of which 64% of subscribers have 3G and 4G connections. The percentage of the population using the Internet accounts for 70% in which the number of users using the Internet via mobile devices accounts for about 95% and they spend 3 hours and 18 minutes on average. This is quite an impressive number proving that smartphones are being prioritized as the main connected devices thanks to their convenience and popularity. Thanks to the low cost, the internet is easy to access with just about 260,000 VND/month, along with the increasingly improved Internet quality which has now reached 60.88 Mbps increasing about 40.7% compared to 2019. These facts make the Internet widely covered and put Vietnam in the TOP 12 countries with the cheapest Internet prices globally and ranked 2nd in Southeast Asia in terms of mobile Internet speed.

Moreover, in NEU, students get free access to the internet, including free emailing and web surfing. They are also frequently required to search online for information related to their coursework. Every student has account to access NEU e.library, Learning management Systems (LMS) and Turnitin so they can search for needed materials and submit assignments on system as per lecturers' request. Notices related to the students are published on NEU website and some facebook groups of NEU studens like "Goc hoc tap Neu" and "Goc thong tin Neu". Besides, they can access to their record like personal information, payments, practicing and studying gradings on online system "daihocchinhquy.neu". All departments and institutions in NEU have their own webpage and fanpage to interact with their students as well.

Research design and hypothesis

A systematic sampling technique targeting all students was employed in distributing the questionnaires on fanpage "Goc thong tin NEU" in March 2021. The 6 elements underpinning interactive marketing activities mentioned in the questionaire are: Facilities, Service Quality, Trust, Responsibility, Relationship Commitment, Complain Handling, and 4 dimensions in Customer Engagement Behavior adapted from the classification of Jaakkohla and Alexander (2014) including: Augmentting behavior (AG), Co-development (CO), Influencing behavior (INF), Mobilizing behavior (MB).

The scales of student's engagement behavior to the university in the context of interactive marketing are explained as follows:

- Augmenting behavior (AG) is understood as active preparation for lessons such as reading online course materials and lectures before class; interacting with lecturers on online learning system, email or Facebook; writing blogs, posts or post pictures about your experiences at school.

- Co-developing behaviour (CO) means providing feedback at term ends on curriculum and teaching methods; participating in seminars (on topics of their interest) and contributing ideas to improve school services such as dormitory services, parking services, etc. through online surveys, or Online feedback channel of the university and faculty…

- Influencing behavior (INF) is demonstrated by actions such as posting or forwarding information about the faculty and university to classmates, juniors; providing feedback/guidance to other students about the information and announcements of the faculty and the university; providing information to high school students/ their parents about the university majors.

- Mobilizing behavior (MB) is reflected in the student's involvement in convincing friends and other students to participate in the activities of the union, student clubs in the university; mobilizing and persuading high school seniors (or their parents) to consider the university after high school graduation.

4. Results

The research obtained 480 valid answer sheets, the data of which was processed and analyzed by tools to test the reliability of the scale, exploratory factor analysis and regression analysis.

The results of testing the reliability of the scale

Cronbach's alpha coefficient and total variable correlation coefficient were used to test the reliability of the scale. The results of factor analysis explore the scales of the following factors:

Sub-factor	Cronbach Alpha	Correlation coefficient
Facilities	0.767	0.554-0.668
Service Quality	0.925	0.694-0.875
Trust	0.761	0.508-0.629
Responsibility	0.721	0.514-0.699
Complain Handling	0.769	0.510-0.711
Relationship Commitment	0.851	0.651-0.746
Co-development (CO)	0.737	0.484-0.676
Influencing behavior (IN)	0.737	0.513-0.652
Augmentting behavior (AG)	0.804	0.563-0.663
Mobilizing behavior (MB)	0.808	0.472-0.744

According to Peterson (1994), Slater (1995), the value of Cronbach Alpha > 0.8 is a good scale; from 0.7 to 0.8 is usable. According to Nunally & Burnstein (1994), the correlation coefficient of the total variable must be > 0.3. Thus, all scales are reliable and qualified to perform exploratory factor analysis.

The results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

According to Hair et al (1998), the exploratory factor analysis test results are satisfactory when the KMO coefficient is between 0.5 and 1; factor loading factor greater than 0.3; Barrtlet's test reached statistical significance (Sig < 0.05); extracted variance is over 50%. Result of factor analysis of independent variables for coefficient KMO = 0.751; Barrlet test has Sig = 0.000 (< 0.05); The total variance extracted is 69.164% and Rotated Component Matrix[a] is as follows:

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
CLDV1 National Economics University always provides me with good quality online services	.883				
CLDV2 NEU always fully equips me with online materials related to my majors	.883				
CLDV3 NEU always fully provides me with updated information and trends related to my major	.829				
CLDV4 The online services of NEU make my study more efficient	.663				

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
TN1 I believe that NEU always provides online services quickly		.784			
TN2 People working at NEU are always willing to help students		.708			
TN3 People working at NEU are always ready to meet students' requirements		.652			
NT1 NEU always shows professionalism in its online services		.625			
NT2 I believe that NEU solves my problems quickly		.550			
NT3 I believe that NEU always treats students fairly		.495			
NT4 I believe that NEU has resolved my complaints satisfactorily		.478			
CKMQH1 The relationship between me and NEU is clearly committed			.833		
CKMQH2 The relationship between me and the NEU deserves to be maintained by the university with maximum effort			.778		
CKMQH3 The most important thing for NEU is to maintain relationships with students like us.			.736		
CKMQH4 I realize that NEU always commits to solve students' problems honestly			.643		
GQPN1 I am satisfied with the way the NEU solves my problems				.862	
GQPN2 I had a good experience solving my problem with NEU				.703	
GQPN3 I am very satisfied with the complaint handling by NEU				.655	
GQPN4 NEU has provided me with a satisfactory solution to my specific problem				.550	

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
CSVC1 National Economics University has attractive online interactive channels					.850
CSVC2 NEU has well managed online interactive channels					.807
CSVC3 I feel very convenient when I study under the IT infrastructure of NEU					.788

The results of exploratory factor analysis show that all scales have factor loading coefficients that meet statistical standards (the smallest coefficient is 0.478). All the independent variables load on the right factor except for the responsibility and trust scales which are loaded in the same factor. This can be explained that for students, their trust in the university and their assessment on the university responsibility towards students is closely related. Thus, if the university improves students' perception about the responsibility that they perform, it would lead to higher students' trust in the university. The results of the EFA analysis of the independent variables forming the representative variables for the factors are renamed as follows: Service quality; Trust and responsibility; Relationship commitment; Complaint handling and Facilities.

The results of factor analysis of independent variables give the coefficient KMO = 0.709; Barrlet test has Sig = 0.000 (> 0.05); total variance extracted reached 66.529%. The results of exploratory factor analysis showed that all scales had factor loading coefficients that met statistical standards and reached values > 0.5. All the independent variables are loaded with the correct theoretical kernel. The results of EFA analysis, the dependent variables form the variables representing the factors named as follows: Augmentting behavior (AG), Co-development (CO), Influencing behavior (INF), Mobilizing behavior (MB).

Results of regression analysis

The influence of interactive marketing activities on student engagement behavior was examined through regression analysis with independent variables presenting students' assessment on 5 new sub-factors of interactive marketing (*CLDV: Service Quality; NT_TN: Trust and Responsibility CKMQH: Relationship Commitment; GQPN: Complain Handling; CSVC: Facilities)* and Dependent variables including Augmentting behavior (AG), Co-development (CO), Influencing behavior (INF), Mobilizing behavior (MB)., respectively.

The results of the regression analysis on the influence of interactive marketing activities on Augmentting behavior (AG) for $R2 = 0.639$ (independent variables explain 63.9% of the change in Augmentting behavior), F= 168.222 with Sig of F test equal to 0.000

(< 0.05). Thus, the regression model is eligible to generalize and apply to the population. The results of the normalized regression function are as follows:

AG = 0.333*CLDV + 0.314*NT_TN + 0.175*CKMQH + 0.251*GQPN + 0.259*CSVC

Students' perception of all interactive marketing activities positively affects augmenting behavior, in which the perception of service quality has the strongest influence. In fact, the convenient and 24/7 online channels help students be more active in the learning process. They interact more easily with faculty and administrative departments related to all of their activities in the university

The results of the regression analysis on the influence of interactive marketing activities on co-developing behavior gave the results $R^2 = 0.624$ (the independent variables explain 62.4% of the change in co-developing behavior), F= 157.219 with Sig of F test equal to 0.000 (<0.05). Thus, the regression model is eligible to generalize and apply to the population. The normalized regression function is as follows:

CO = 0.298*CLDV + 0.464*NT_TN + 0.172*CKMQH + 0.243*GQPN + 0.199*CSVC

It can be concluded that students' perceptions of all interactive marketing activities positively affect their co-developing behavior, in which feelings of trust and responsibility have the strongest influence. In fact, behaviors such as providing opinions and feedback at the term-end about teaching methods and curriculum, facilities and other support services of the university through online survey and possibly in the anonymous way really works. Students feel better about the responsibility and willingness of the university to understand the needs and aspirations of students. It enhances more trust in the university, thereby promoting the participation of students in the learning process and contribution to the development of the university.

Regression analysis results on the influence of interactive marketing activities on influencing behavior for the results $R^2 = 0.628$ (independent variables explain 63.9% of the change in the influencing behavior), F= 159.718 with the Sig of the F-test equal to 0.000 (< 0.05). Thus, the regression model is eligible to generalize and apply to the population. The results of the normalized regression function are as follows:

INF = 0.346*CLDV + 0.389*NT_TN + 0.197*CKMQH + 0.249*GQPN + 0.246*CSVC

It shows that students' perceptions of all interactive marketing activities have a positive influence on students' influencing behavior, in which the perception of Trust and responsibility and Service quality have the strongest impact. Once students appreciate the responsibility and quality of service and have trust in the university, they are more likely to share their experiences with others. They actively share useful information related to their learning experience and skills in online groups that built and managed by the university and

the faculty, alongside with their own personal space on social networking sites like Facebook, Tiktok, Instagram...

The results of the regression analysis on the influence of interactive marketing activities on the *mobilizing behavior* gave the results R2 = 0.545 (independent variables explain 54.5% of the change in *mobilizing behavior*). development), F= 113,619 with Sig of F test equal to 0.000 (< 0.05). Thus, the regression model is eligible to generalize and apply to the population. The results of the normalized regression function are as follows:

MB = 0.329*CLDV + 0.253*NT_TN + 0.219*CKMQH + 0.222*GQPN + 0.337*CSVC

Students' perception of all interactive marketing activities positively affects mobilizing behavior, in which the perception of facilities and service quality has the strongest influence. These positive feelings and evaluations are the basis for students to not only share but also entice and convince other people such as high school seniors and their relatives to choose the university they are studying. It is the students of the university that can be seen as an important link connecting and attracting potential customers for that university.

5. Conclusion

In general, the results of this study support the positive effects of interactive marketing activities on students' engagement behavior. Interactive marketing activities have exploited the advantages of interaction in the digital platforms such as the immediacy and continuity, as well as the ability to systematically and clearly measure and capture learners' feedback. Good service quality and facilities, strong responsibility and commitment of the university are good basis for students to share and spread positive information to other community. These behavior would contribute significantly in building and developing the university brand.

The limitation of this study is that it has not been able to clarify the evaluation of interactive marketing of each interaction channel, separated departments and faculties in the university. As the results, it can not suggest specific implications or solutions for the university. For example, survey results show that there is a high level of satisfaction with facilities or service quality, but this evaluation may not be the same across different channels of interaction or among different departments. Further studies in the future shall be designed to fix this limitation.

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