

# Empirical Measurement of Marketing Mixes and the Effectiveness of Interest Generation Tools

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## Abstract

Online business growth and internet penetration contributes to increasing markets and new opportunities arising, while methods to retain customers are constantly changed by new technologies. Browsing of certain businesses' websites could complete sales, thus, studying the efficiency of emergent communication tools provides useful insights. We developed a framework-mix and designed a questionnaire to investigate this issue, using non-probability sampling for framework testing. The data processed (66 questionnaires) had a p-value of <0.05 with the F-values for convenience, information-providing (Sic.) and time-consuming being 22.64, 60.41 and 41.45 respectively. We found effective e-marketing must be targeted to first maximize interest and then convenient access to increase transactions, whereas increased "appropriateness" for surface level information is done using search engines or at product / service providers' websites. We also identified the e-marketing attributes that negatively impact businesses, in particular pop-ups and forced advertising, whereas a well-designed and effective web presence earned special mention.

**Keywords:** Communication Methods, Customer Attraction, E-marketing, Marketing Presence, Maximizing Purchases.

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# 行銷組合與興趣產生工具有效性的實證衡量

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## 摘要

線上業務增長與網際網路的普及，有助於促成市場不斷的成長和新的商業機會，如何留住顧客則需隨著新科技的發展而不斷的改變。鑒於希望瀏覽企業的網站即可完成銷售，因此本研究提升資訊交流工具的效率，針對這項議題提供有用的見解。本研究開發一個框架組合及設計問卷調查，並使用非機率抽樣進行框架測試。數據處理（66 個問卷）的  $p$  值  $< 0.05$ ， $F$  值在便利性、資訊提供（顯著）及耗時性分別為 22.64、60.41 和 41.45。研究發現要達成有效的網路行銷，首先必須瞄準顧客的最大興趣，合宜方便的入口以增加交易，進而透過使用搜尋引擎或在產品／服務提供商的網站上，增加表面信息的適合性。研究也確認對企業產生負面影響的網路行銷之屬性，建議對於彈出窗口和強制廣告的處理方式，如此對於精心設計和有效的網站形象可以贏得顧客的關注。

**關鍵詞：**溝通方法、顧客吸引力、網路行銷、市場佔有率、最大化購買量。

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## **1. Introduction**

The rapid development of the internet has changed the way companies work and create e-commerce and e-business opportunities. E-commerce is defined as “financial transactions and information across organizations and any other third parties” [1]. E-commerce can be sub-divided into several categories: business-to-business (B2B), business to consumer (B2C), consumer to consumer (C2C). This research focuses on the B2C model, which is defined as “online commercial transactions between organizations and customers” [2]. Investment by businesses in e-commerce has grown along with availability of the internet. Development of new technology such as smart phones further allows 24/7 roaming access. Network speeds (both mobile and static) are also increasing market penetration.

## **2. Material and Methods**

### **2.1 E-marketing**

In addition to the buying facility that the internet offers, the internet functions as a promotion space. Due to the internet’s increasingly flexible application and growing user base, the internet is rapidly surpassing traditional channels of communication such as television, magazines, leaflets, radio [3]. Digital marketing, online marketing, and e-marketing are here referred to as “online marketing”. Mediums where information is exchanged include social media, email marketing, online advertising and search engine marketing. These mediums are used to purvey information, improve relationships with customers, attract new customers, and improve customer management systems.

### **2.2 Demographic Influences**

Boundaries of accessibility, gender, occupation and education are fading, supported by changes in technology management systems. Internet access devices are used by the elderly, the unemployed and children as the technology becomes easier to use and supports interactive behavior [4]. One of the most frequent user bases that is also seeing greatest internet adoption rates, is college students aged 18-22. This demographic is highly interested by new products, easily accepts new trends and they are frequently early adopters [5]. This is the group where we will focus our research.

### **2.3 Usefulness**

By considering the pros and cons of traditional channels and new technology in terms of

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efficiency we can assess both the value and effectiveness of new technologies [6]. Effectiveness in this sense is “the right thing” at “the right time”; practically speaking that is matching requirements and outcomes. From the perspective of the marketer, they require: attraction of new business, retention of business, to understand customer needs, how best to associate with the customer and how to maintain contact with customers [7]. In an ideal scenario the result of meeting these requirements is that the customer will complete a purchase on their site, thus providing personal information to the seller, the possibility of return custom (as trust is earned), improved brand identification, and an ability to influence future purchase intention [8].

## 2.4 Concepts

To be successful in completing the requirements set out above, companies should develop a specific model or framework which represents their online marketing strategy [9]. This cohesiveness is as important as any traditional marketing plan and cannot be approached haphazardly.

Online marketing frameworks presently contain five factors. Each factor supports and adds more information to the one preceding it. These factors include: attracting new customers, engaging customer attention, retaining customers, learning the attitudes and behavior of customers and relating to customers by providing products or services. All the factors are influential, however much hinges on attraction. Because of the importance of the “attraction principle” in leading to the other factors we opted to further refine our study from the age 18-22 demographic, to attraction in the age 18-22 demographic. The communication tools available today in online marketing used to attract customers include: Search Engine Marketing, Online Promotions, E-mail Marketing, Viral Marketing and Interactive Advertising [10]. Timing and usability attributes could also play important roles when using the above mentioned tools as suggested by various studies [11] [12] [13].

## 2.5 Existing Tools

Here we will consider the following points as undisputed for our study.

### 2.5.1 Search Engine (Optimization)

“Search engine marketing (SEM) is a form of Internet marketing that involves the promotion of websites by increasing their visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs) through optimization and advertising.” [14]

“There is at least one clear path between the search engine and conversion outcome. We find it helpful to think backwards: First consider where you want your visitor to end up, and

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then work backward to find great page for them to enter your site.” [15]

### 2.5.2 Online Promotion

“Online Promotion is the propagation of information about the brand image of companies and their products through the direct online form or through third party websites, where companies' potential customers can access.” [16] [17]

“Social Web includes all social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), branded web destinations (Amazon.com and EBay etc.) and different enterprise sites. The visibility of the contents provided by the individual and the community should be maximized by different lists, groups and classifications that would make the information easily accessible and understandable.” [18] [19]

### 2.5.3 E-mail Advertising

“Directly market a commercial message to a group of people using email. In its broadest sense, every email sent to a potential or current customer could be considered email marketing. It usually involves using email to send ads, request business, or solicit sales or donations, and is meant to build loyalty, trust, or brand awareness.” [20]

### 2.5.4 Viral Marketing

“Viral marketing, viral advertising, or marketing-buzz are buzzwords referring to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networking services and other technologies to produce increases in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives (such as product sales) through self-replicating viral processes, analogous to the spread of viruses or computer viruses (cf. Internet memes and memetics). It can be delivered by word of mouth or enhanced by the network effects of the Internet and mobile networks.” [21]

### 2.5.5 Interactive Advertising

“Paid and unpaid presentation and promotion of products, services and ideas by an identified sponsor through mediated means involving mutual action between consumers and producers.” [22]

Table I Participants' perception of the online communication attributes

| Attributes  | Description                              | Perception |
|-------------|--|------------|
| Interesting | Pleasant to read and receive information | +          |
| Appropriate | The right kind of information            | -          |
| Reliable    | Information is dependable                | +          |

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|                |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|
| Time-consuming | Information takes a lot of time to be distributed | - |
| Convenient     | Information is obtained with ease                 | + |
| Acceptable     | Viewers agree to the information being provided   | + |
| Reject         | Information provided is not accepted              | - |
| Objectionable  | Communication presents some difficulties          | - |
| Disruptive     | Communication is being disrupted by various noise | - |
| Informative    | Information provided can be used                  | + |

## 2.6 Useful Communications

How can a company's online message be conveyed most effectively?

D. Jerman and B. Završnik [23] compiled a list of attributes (reproduced in Table 1) used to describe peoples' reactions, both positive and negative to advertising in online media channels. The authors note that these attributes have been extensively tested on various user groups, over different user demographics as well as different online communication channels. We will take these attributes to be correct for our study.

## 2.7 E-marketing Principles

A paper by Chong, W. K et al confirms the points discussed thus far, that is we are able to observe three main activities: conversion (appeal to customers), acquisition (attraction of visitors to the site) and retention (return custom). [24]

One issue potential customer's face in today's internet market place is internet clutter or "noise". The rapidity of click-throughs, shortening of attention span by users to obtain what they are looking for and inattention to detail are all obstacles that a successful marketer must overcome. Nothing can guarantee the success of a marketing model, due in part to speed of development of internet based interests; marketers need to be agile, attracting customers by a combination of means. Online marketing is not a static billboard placed online, it is a complex interaction of communications activities following a definite, yet flexible plan. [25]

Most companies have a website; however that in itself will not guarantee new customers. Poorly designed sites, or those which provide wrong or inadequate information can actually harm a company's potential for offline business. This "customer turn-off" effect is amplified in the millennial generation (or even those born in the early 90's) where they will not have any memory of life without the internet. [26]

## 2.8 Analysis

From the completed questionnaires we received, most of our respondents were in the

18-27 age group. They were passionate about using the internet, citing daily usage of between 2-3 hours. Common uses given were to find desired information, as well as shopping for various products and services. Users also reported using the internet for personal and professional communications through a variety of means: social media, email, live video chat, offline/online short messages. Moreover, they don't necessarily consider the internet a direct channel of communication with companies, but when they have a need for a product or service they will search for information about companies providing a product or service of their choice online. Therefore, companies should have well designed and informative websites that can be easy to navigate and follow, avoiding too overly complex and unnecessary details in order to better serve existing and potentially new customers.

## **2.9 Respondents' Analysis**

In Section V (Framework Concepts) we identified “attraction” as the most important of the five principles so we tried to garner more information about this factor that govern opinions about this communication channel.

The convenience attribute received the highest number of votes (41). This is somewhat understandable as many respondents also commented that their use of the internet was for convenience of research.

The “convenience” factor ranked highest in our study, and also turned out to be highly time-sensitive. A user’s willingness to invest time to research, or send and receive information must be rewarded promptly with correct and concise data. In certain cases, depending on the type of information needed, customers may need additional time online when compared with something that could be accomplished by a phone call to the customer service/information desk of a company. Distributed information online can be easily missed or ignored by either end of the information chain.

The “interest” attribute scored second highest. This shows us that if the interest generated is high enough, it can be a valuable communication channel for distributing information.

The “acceptability” attribute ranked third. Thus if a potential customer is willing to accept a particular tool or venue as a means of receiving communication it significantly boosts the chance of successful conversion.

Fourth was the “informative” attribute, which seems to act more as a reward for the prior points of convenience and pursued effort to obtain information. Information draws us back to the means of search and we must consider the potency of Google's search engine as a means of SEM.

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In summary, the internet is an important communication channel primarily defined by the following attributes (in rank order): convenience, time-effectiveness, interest, informativeness, and acceptability.

Regrettably, as we noted earlier this neat situation is muddled by the massive amount of information and complexity that often overwhelms users. It is this aspect that adds considerable amounts of time as a burden to the user's part. Here our findings tie in with the findings of combining the above factors. The average user:

- Does not like to pay fees for on-line information.
- Will not stay long enough in the sites to be able to capture all information.
- Depends heavily on search engines.
- Trusts the search engines online but never questions how and why the search results are made.
- Surfs the web as a way of entertainment, ex: bidding products, window-shopping online.

Also we must remember that the customer may have been further desensitized to product messages by Spam or other obtrusive marketing/advertising techniques. Together these create a pandemonium and cacophony of information. This has the net result of producing changes in online behavior; making users less reliable, more complex and highly demanding. Commonly users are aware of many brands but little loyalty for any specific one.

## **2.10 Method**

Using a deductive approach we developed our own framework-mix and designed our questionnaire with a combination of both quantitative and qualitative questions. To test the framework we undertook non-probability sampling, reduced the qualitative data and ran an ANOVA test. Feng Chia University was the main source of our data.

A total of 60 people answered our questionnaire, most of whom were mostly college students. Our questionnaire was divided into three parts, asking the participants about online behavior, online communication tools, and finally their feedback.

# **3. Results and Discussions**

## **3.1 ANOVA Results**

As seen in Table II, the p-value is  $< 0.05$ , indicating the results of this study are statistically significant. Furthermore, the F-value for the attributes of convenience, informative, and time-consuming are 22.64, 60.41, and 41.45 respectively, all being greater than 1.

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Consequently, all three properties exhibit a significant effect in attracting customers across all five online communication tools that we are investigating.

Table II ANOVA results for the attributes of convenience, informativeness, and time-consumption

| <b>Test Convenience</b> | <b>Informativeness</b> | <b>Time-consumption</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| p-value 0.0001          | 0.0001                 | 0.0001                  |
| f-value 22.64           | 60.41                  | 41.45                   |

### 3.2 Results Analysis

Currently, companies use online promotions as a preferred way to convey information to customers, establish marginal propensity to consume, and encourage customers to examine their communication message more closely. Things that increase the efficiency of this method are creating website interaction events and customer comments/feedback. A typical example is the introduction of company presences on social networks, where attitudes and buying behaviors can be observed more clearly. Online promotion is most effective when companies are able to initiate the buying trend and generate attraction, if not online promotion will be easily rejected.

#### 3.2.1 Email-Marketing

At the time internet adoption was getting wide spread adoption, email marketing was the only way for companies to transmit information to their customers. Email marketing was the frontrunner of today's online communication. Therefore, customers still feel somewhat comfortable getting information from companies and consider this information reliable and informative. This is true only for emails where the customer is subscribed and where they have accessed the company online more than once. Today we not only have subscribed email, but also unsolicited and spam mail which makes customers feel uncomfortable; because it comes from unreliable sources and in very large quantities. As a generalization this detracts from the potency of all email marketing.

#### 3.2.2 Viral Marketing

The majority of our participants commended viral marketing as a method of communication. It was branded “interesting” and “entertaining” though “unreliable” and “insufficient” in terms of information. Viral marketing had interesting and concise messages and if it was successful it was able to influence attraction. But the primary weakness of viral

marketing is the potential for wasted resources if it is overlooked; it also often contains a risk of controversy if the campaign is considered “edgy”.

### 3.2.3 Interactive Advertising

Our study showed Interactive Advertising is the least influential communication tool. It is associated with: “lack of information”, “less inconvenience”, and “time consuming”. Specific comments from our survey read:

“Stop putting ads at the beginning of a video and put them at the end. This way, I have a choice to fast-forward to view the commercial or not view it at all.”

“I’m not interested in ads.”

### 3.2.4 Search Engines

The Search Engine of choice also has a strong influence on our participants. As we have observed in our study and discussed in this paper, internet users trust the information they receive when using a search engine, they also state that it saves time. Search Engine Marketing is thus an ideal means by which to hijack attention.

### 3.2.5 Online Promotion

Online Promotion is one of the most prevalent methods for communicating product and service information by companies because it gives users a feeling of convenience and reliability. Online Promotion is seen as an indirect approach and more as a social interaction through network effects to attract current and potential new customers.

## 3.3 Discussion

With email’s adoption as a formal means of correspondence, it is coming to be trusted by recipients; however the timing of that approach is almost impossible to get right, unlike a Search Engine where users self-select the data. The few times email marketing is likely to succeed is when users that are really interested in a certain product or service happen to receive a message about a particular product/service, combined with a promotion or discount, for example Black Friday deals where people may be waiting for an opportunity to purchase at a discounted rate. The probability for timing and required service/product to coincide with an email message is relatively low, except for notable holidays and seasonal/cyclical purchases.

With Viral Marketing our participants found that the two characteristics “convenience” and “interest” were the most significant. Demographic factors such as gender and age seem to be less significant in viral marketing.

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### **3.4 Further Studies**

In our research, two particular attributes, convenience and time-factor are repeatedly shown to be valuable in making a company's marketing message heard. A notable limitation in our study was the population size and demographic. Most respondents were age 20-27, with a small number age 28-60. Although people in the 20-27 group were very active and generally knowledgeable regarding the internet, we cannot dismiss the other age groups and their impact/opinion on online marketing communication tools. It is still a well-established fact that purchasing power increases as one gets older and in order to tap into this market further study would be advisable. This study would also help us to understand how age may influence the online consumer buying behaviors.

In this final section we would like to issue a small word of warning to marketers. Certain combination of commercials and information from companies in the form of pop-up windows/boxes, and text ads are easily rejected by customers. Not only are they rejected but can cause harm to a company's image if repeatedly received in an unwanted way. Interactive Advertising is also considered annoying and distracting by respondents.

Despite internet prevalence in many aspects of modern daily life, many customers still do not see the internet as a direct communication channel to companies. They often use the internet as a place for hobbies or personal needs and rarely communicate with companies unless it is part of a work related activity. This indicates that this aspect of internet use as a means of advertising will develop further with time.

As marketing on the internet is fast entering a realm of its own, it appears that customers are becoming more passive in their approach, waiting to receive information before acting. Businesses and companies are aware of this and are becoming more and more aggressive in finding avenues of approach to ensure customer involvement. What marketers must be aware of is the fact that as this approach becomes the new normal and businesses accordingly ratchet up their campaign, they simultaneously risk desensitizing customers to online communications.

## **4. Conclusions**

From our study we observe that the internet is a potent communication channel for companies, however, customers do not always favor it in similar ways. Thus, combinations of the various modes of internet use should be wisely exploited by companies. With the correct mix of online marketing communication tools, the internet offers tremendous potential for attracting customers. In our research the most favored online marketing communication tools were Search Engine Marketing, Online Promotion, and Viral Marketing; in which there are

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certain similarities. The core similarity being that they optimize the “convenience” and “time-factor”. They do this by different means, but the net result is that people preferred information that had first been sifted and vetted by a third party, and they feel it is more convenient, safer and trustworthy, or at the very least tallies with their requirement for internet use as “hobby” or “entertainment” time. To optimally attract customers businesses should not focus first on their framework, but on tools that will provide the impression of “convenience” and “time-saving” attributes.

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