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The Rise of Mobile Marketing: A Decade of Research in Review

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The Rise of Mobile Marketing: A Decade of Research in Review

Zeynep Aydin-Gokgoz¹, M. Berk Ataman² and Gerrit van Bruggen³

ABSTRACT

Paralleling the growing space mobile phones take in today's consumers' daily routines, academic mobile marketing research has been growing at an increasing pace recently. The presence of multiple players in the mobile eco-system and the wide range of topics under investigation, coupled with the fragmented nature of the mobile marketing domain, call for an updated unifying framework. Accordingly, this review looks at the last decade of mobile marketing research and provides an overview by offering an integrated framework and an extensive review of the research in this domain. Based on a database of 178 articles published in top marketing journals over the last decade, we formulate a framework that is based on (1) the transformation of consumer behavior considering the shifts in users' lifestyles, (2) the effects of mobile on the transformation of existing and the emergence of new businesses, and (3) the integration of mobile within the existing channel mix and its interaction with other channels. In this framework, we first classify each article under

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various research themes, type of data collection, and their dependent and independent variables. We then synthesize the extant literature in each of the sub-research topics under our framework: the mobile transformations of consumers and businesses, mobile applications, mobile channel deployment and integration, mobile advertising and promotions, promotions, how mobile facilitates consumer-to-business connections, and mobile data. This review provides insights on the recent evolution of the mobile marketing field as well as presenting avenues for future research.

1

Introduction

Businesses and marketers have witnessed tremendous changes during the latest decade. Although consumers have always been in the center of marketing activities, developing a thorough understanding of the "new consumers" – rapidly undergoing dramatic changes due to the mobile revolution – has become crucially important. Mobile phones have become the all-time, inseparable companions of consumers since the release of the iPhone in 2007. The rise of social media, combined with technological improvements, has created an always online consumer, altering not just the consumers, but also their connections with businesses in a variety of ways. Consumers now have instant access to precise product information and are connected to businesses and other consumers, giving them more power (Varadarajan et al., 2010) and more occasions to influence the purchasing decisions of others (Kumar, 2015). The realization of this empowerment has changed how consumers act.

Businesses must make sense of these behavioral shifts before responding to the changing customers through revised marketing strategies. Although this may require a radical transformation for businesses that operate in the traditional sense – if they recognize the need for change

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the shift in users' daily routines provides enterprises with new opportunities as well. Businesses can now reach out to connected customers at any time, achieving levels of engagement that were previously unattainable (e.g., with the help of additional information on a customer's location or behavioral history). Companies, such as Amazon, Twitter, and Facebook, have successfully revised their strategies into a mobile-first manner and grabbed the opportunities to connect more deeply with on-the-go consumers. The new opportunities provided by the dynamics of the mobile medium created room for new, innovative firms to thrive. Mobile enterprises, such as Uber, Netflix, Spotify, M-Pesa, and WhatsApp challenged established business models by meeting the changing needs of customers and their new routines in novel ways.

The changes in consumers' daily lives and the consequent transformation of the business world have echoed in the research conducted in the academic marketing domain. Research on mobile marketing has studied various features of this medium, illuminating different fragments of the mobile ecosystem. The increasing number of articles published in major academic marketing journals over the years reflects a growth in attention at an increasing pace. The growing body of knowledge on the subject as well as the also-fragmented nature of research within the wider mobile ecosystem call for a synthesizing review and a unifying framework. In this monograph we aim to develop a unifying framework and review research in the mobile marketing domain in the past decade (2010–2019) using this framework.

So far, researchers have defined mobile marketing and offered an integrated framework (Shankar and Balasubramanian, 2009); positioned mobile marketing within the recent wave of interactive marketing efforts (Ratchford, 2015); and discussed it as part of a grand digital marketing framework (Kannan and Li, 2017). Recently, in their thematic exploration of digital, social, and mobile marketing, Lamberton and Stephen (2016) called for research on the differences between mobile and other digital or social channels. The authors call for insights into issues such as the effective use of mobile marketing's unique features, the understanding of mobile practices and consumer goals, and for the development of theories of mobile behavior. We add to these insights

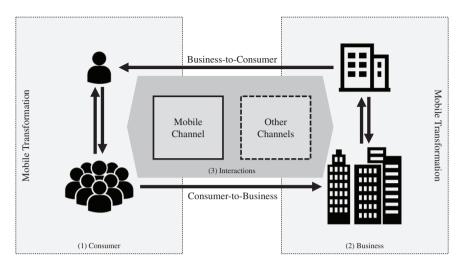


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework.

by focusing exclusively on mobile marketing and exhaustively covering recent research in marketing.

We structure our review around the pillars and the interactions identified within computer-mediated environments: consumer-to-firm, firm-to-consumer, consumer-to-consumer, and firm-to-firm (Yadav and Pavlou, 2014). To that end, we broadly classify mobile marketing papers under three main themes: (1) the transformation of consumer behavior enabled by the mobile shift in consumers' daily routines; (2) the mobile transformation of existing, and the emergence of new, businesses enabled by mobile platforms; and (3) the interaction and integration of the mobile channel with other channels. Our conceptual framework is graphically depicted in Figure 1.1.

The left-hand side of our framework (discussed in Section 3 of the review) focuses on how mobile technology transforms consumers and their behavior, along with their interactions with other consumers. The right-hand side (Section 4) outlines the transformation of traditional businesses and the emergence of new ones. The middle part of our framework delves into how businesses interact with consumers, including the interaction of the mobile channel with traditional channels (Section 5), and how consumers interact with businesses on the

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reverse side (Section 6). In line with Tong et al. (2019), the "business-to-consumer interaction" in our review is structured around the 4P's of marketing within the mobile marketing mix. Specifically, mobile apps as stand-alone products and their pricing strategies are discussed in a separate Mobile Apps section. We then turn our attention to the mobile channel, reviewing the literature on a firm's decision to add the mobile channel to its mix of distribution channels, its integration with existing channels, and its impact on business outcomes. We conclude our review of how mobile reshapes business-to-consumer interactions with a discussion on the attitudes towards and the effect of mobile advertising, and the effectiveness of mobile promotions, placing special emphasis on location-based targeting. Last, we discuss the novel uses of mobile data (Section 7) and present avenues for future research (Section 8).

The synthesis of the literature corresponding to each part of the conceptual framework can be summarized as follows.

- Mobile Transformation of the Consumer (Section 3): The-new-to-the-user features of mobile such as ubiquity have created a different form of connection with its users, becoming an integral part of their extended self-concept. This new type of connection has: (1) placed privacy concerns of users to a prominent place within the growing body of research; (2) opened up a new and important research domain for studying user interactions with smartphones; and finally (3) served to transform the digital consumer-to-consumer interactions as well as presenting a new avenue for research to investigate the discrepancies between mobile and digital user generated content.
- Mobile Transformation of Businesses (Section 4): The users' mobile transformation gave rise to a consequent transformation in businesses while presenting them with unique and easy-to-grasp opportunities. Companies from a wide range of industries such as social media, retailing, payment, and service have either grasped these new opportunities or timely prioritized their strategies to seamlessly integrate mobile into a crucial place.

- Mobile Connects Businesses to Consumers (Section 5):
 - (i) Mobile Applications (Section 5.1): The mobile application space, serving as a new channel to reach consumers, has attracted vast attention not only from practitioners but also from scholars to unearth the dynamics of this fast-growing new market. The antecedents and consequences of app adoption, engagement, and retention, as well as app pricing strategies have thoroughly been investigated in the recent years to shed light on this novel space.

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- (ii) Mobile Channel Deployment and Integration (Section 5.2): The level of personalization, ubiquity and the location sensitivity features served as a driving force to position mobile as a prominent new channel. Therefore, recent research on the integration of the mobile channel into the channel mix, the effects of this integration on firm performance, and the changing nature of consumer behavior within and across channels have provided us with valuable insights on how to effectively navigate this new channel and to understand its impact on consumer decisions and behavior.
- (iii) Mobile Advertising and Promotions (Section 5.3): Location sensitivity and interactivity features of mobile coupled with the personalization possibility make mobile an attractive medium for advertising and promotions. Therefore, recent research in this stream has advanced our knowledge on the effects of several promotion and consumer characteristics on the effectiveness of mobile advertising and promotions, as well as the effects of surrounding contextual factors.
- Mobile Connects Consumers to Businesses (Section 6): The ubiquity of mobile combined with today's connected consumer network enabled consumers to effortlessly reach back to companies, creating a readily available, organic source of feedback for companies. This section summarizes the nascent literature on this "consumer to businesses" reverse channel.

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• Mobile Data (Section 7): New sources and types of data afforded by mobile as well as the challenges of handling these new types of data are presented in this section.

In the next section, we outline our approach in identifying the research papers that form the basis of our review and provide an overview of the evolution of mobile marketing research over the decade.

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