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Developing Customer Trust in E-Commerce Using Inbound Marketing Strategies

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Abstract

Developing a new argument that digital content is a factor for inbound marketing campaigns is redundant, considering there are numerous papers in the relevant literature. The aim of this paper is to use FsQCA to demonstrate the direct implications of quality content as a trust factor on the acquisition of search engine traffic. Concluding on strategies to build customer confidence in e-commerce, based on educative and representative content on a particular niche. In this research, we've analyzed 18 causal conditions collected from different online references to reach the outcome. These findings can help marketing managers to develop strategies to attract a relevant audience for e-commerce websites.

Keywords: *Inbound marketing, e-commerce, FsQCA, qualitative analysis, search engine optimization.*

1. Introduction

In spite of the fact that the importance of trust is directly connected to the transaction cost in eCommerce, this article attempts to understand the factors that constitute the building blocks for successful inbound marketing campaigns [32, 24].

Commitment as a component of trust requires potential vulnerability and sacrifice [12, 22], this is why marketing communication is the key element in customer based engagement. This aspect is even more evident in

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the online economic environment where the perceived value of goods and services are competing in the global marketplace.

Numerous papers have been written addressing the issue of trust in the online world, and also lots of tools and elements have been developed to facilitate the growing e-commerce needs. This article does not intend to add a new model or concept about the technical world, but to try to understand what determines the building of trust on a couple of websites that have a primary target of e-commerce. The method used in this analysis is Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (FsQCA) that will allow a qualitative analysis [26] based on technical factors related to the e-commerce solution, content marketing strategies and social media.

2. Literature review

We mostly encounter trust in relationship marketing, and of course, it refers to the arrangement between the buyer and the seller. It provides confidence in the exchange of reliability and integrity. [22]. Trust plays a major role in the services marketing notes that the efficient services marketing depend on the management of trust considering the client is buying a service even before he is experiencing it. Even more, it is important to maintain a good relationship for a recurrent sell, relying on a partner with confidence in the services business most of the time is considered a competitive advantage. The economy of Romania has emerged as a potential for new ventures, and trust is viewed as a transactional costs factor in all business endeavors. Through such instances, numerous partnership strategies are becoming viable including franchising, joint ventures, and business process outsourcing. [9]

Usually, the trust associated with an individual's honesty or integrity such as a salesman [18] or a team that can perform certain tasks. Rather than looking at trust from person to person interaction, we will focus our efforts on how people perceive it when they are visiting a website or buying something online. Jiang [15] argues on how the perceived reputation of a website can be influenced positively by the perception of trust that customers have on the site's blog. Usually, blog posts are related to important industry niche, and useful insights differentiate good content with up to date information transparently and directly.

Content strategies might include delivering consistent, ongoing valuable information to clients and prospects to educate them, communicating in such a way that is not related to the direct selling. Even more, Google search updated algorithms can differentiate quality content

that is intending to educate, it’s relevant to the website specific topic, and that is also well structured [33].

3. Trust in e-commerce

Many research papers have addressed the element of trust in e-commerce. A significant example is a comprehensive comparison and analysis that presents five models created by Hussain and Macaulay [14]. The term trust is more sensitive in e-commerce because the web is a less controllable environment [10]. One of the trust’s dimensions presented in Hussain and Macaulay [14] paper is content to trust and how Yi Lin and Yazdanifard [17] lists content marketing is one of the preferred inbound marketing strategies for an updated Google algorithm. They also predict that the search engines will get better on understanding the essence of the page and connect to user searches using the semantic web, but not only from metadata and markup but also from sentiment analysis and sentence structure.

The first trust dimensions listed by Hussain and Macaulay [14] is the merchant trust identified by institutional validation and customer protection usually done using a digital certificate, Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) being the standard security technology for an encrypted connection between the browser and a web server. Both content and SSL with 16 other dimensions used as causal conditions in this analysis listed in table 1.

Table 1. List of trust dimensions, updated after Hussain

| Trust dimension | List of trust attributes |
|--------------------|--|
| Merchant-trust | Company name, company contact details, privacy policy, third party for secure transaction, third party endorsement, staff name, photo of staff |
| Content-trust | Website layout and structure, usability, active blog, relevant content, user guidance and support |
| Product-trust | Product brand, product price, product promotion, product handling, transparency |
| Process-trust | Order procedure, payment procedure, customer tracking facility, after-sales service |
| Social-Media-trust | Social media endorsements, social media proprietary content, availability, time to respond |
| Technical-trust | website loading performance, mobile responsive layout, open source repositories, SSL certificate |

Based on Hussain et al. [14] list of trust dimensions and attributes, we've created an updated version adding dimensions for social media, technical trust and highlighting the importance of content.

4. Data and analysis method

4.1. Structure

This study uses a multitude of online tools available to investigate specific metrics and attributes regarding websites or online shop, for this research we've analyzed a total of 27 e-commerce site within a similar niche, selling electronic products - website templates. For the specific internet sites, a collection of 18 factors is listed in the table below.

Table 2. Variables used in the FsQCA analysis

| | Variable | Description |
|----|----------|--|
| 1 | bpf | number of blog posts - information obtained from the sitemap of the website |
| 2 | wp | if it is WordPress or not - a browser module called wappalizer was used in order to determine the content management system of the website |
| 3 | Nginx | if it is Nginx or not - wappalyzer |
| 4 | SSL | if the website has an SSL certificate - information available in the browser |
| 5 | ltf | website loading time - information available on pingdom.com |
| 6 | psf | homepage size in Mb - pingdom.com |
| 7 | nrf | number of requests made by the homepage - pingdom.com |
| 8 | fblf | number of facebook likes on the facebook page |
| 9 | tff | number of twitter followers on the twitter account |
| 10 | yff | number of youtube followers on youtube |
| 11 | iff | Instagram followers |
| 12 | pff | Pinterest followers |
| 13 | ardf | Number of referral domains - information available on ahrefs.com |

| | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 14 | srstf | search engine traffic - information available on semrush.com |
| 15 | srptf | search engine paid traffic - semrush.com |
| 16 | brf | bounce rate - information available on alexa.com |
| 17 | arf | Alexa global rank - alexa.com has an index with more than 50 million websites and ranks them by popularity |
| 18 | tsf | Avg. time on site daily - alexa.com |

The data has been collected in July 2017 from 27 ecommerce websites and also from third party websites, ex semrush.com, alexa.com, Facebook, twitter, YouTube, pingdom.com, etc.

4.2 Research proposition using FsQCA Method

Using the Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (FsQCA) we will be able to find causal conditions necessary to acquire inbound traffic. It will evaluate and result in the combinatory conditions listed in table 4. This process will determine an increase in the search engine traffic of an e-commerce website.

The qualitative nature of the FsQCA research model is determined by the calibrations of the causal condition and outcome variables [26].

For the calibration of the data we've used three thresholds as qualitative anchors:

- Full nonmembership
- Crossover point
- Full membership point

The calibration has been done using FsQCA v.2 software, and the descriptive analysis can be viewed in the table 3.

Previous research indicates the importance of trust dimensions [14], but when it comes to managerial decision making, it is hard to decide where to start from, and what is the combination of attributes needed for an inbound marketing strategy.

Table 3. Descriptive analysis using the FsQCA software

| Variable | Mean | Std. Dev. | Minimum | Maximum | Cases |
|----------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|
| bpf | 0.312963 | 0.3523342 | 0.03 | 1 | 27 |
| wp | 0.8518519 | 0.3552468 | 0 | 1 | 27 |

| | | | | | |
|-------|-----------|-----------|------|------|----|
| nginx | 0.7037037 | 0.4566233 | 0 | 1 | 27 |
| ssl | 0.7777778 | 0.4157397 | 0 | 1 | 27 |
| ltf | 0.3951852 | 0.3118923 | 0.03 | 1 | 27 |
| psf | 0.3248148 | 0.3399496 | 0 | 1 | 27 |
| nrf | 0.602963 | 0.3565038 | 0.02 | 1 | 27 |
| fblf | 0.4111111 | 0.3042335 | 0.04 | 1 | 27 |
| tff | 0.5203704 | 0.3698596 | 0.03 | 1 | 27 |
| yff | 0.3925926 | 0.3746168 | 0.04 | 1 | 27 |
| iff | 0.1892593 | 0.2755725 | 0.04 | 1 | 27 |
| pff | 0.2388889 | 0.3608153 | 0.04 | 1 | 27 |
| ardf | 0.5411111 | 0.2736764 | 0.04 | 1 | 27 |
| srstf | 0.4455556 | 0.295589 | 0.04 | 1 | 27 |
| srptf | 0.162963 | 0.2551661 | 0.04 | 1 | 27 |
| brf | 0.4748148 | 0.290075 | 0.04 | 0.99 | 27 |
| arf | 0.6888889 | 0.245377 | 0.03 | 1 | 27 |
| tsf | 0.4740741 | 0.3759951 | 0.01 | 0.99 | 27 |

For this prediction model we've taken into consideration different groups of causal conditions using the FsQCA software, and one we want to list in particular.

$$\text{srstf} = f(\text{bpf}, \text{ssl}, \text{ltf}, \text{ardf}, \text{brf})$$

The scope is to test the outcome of search engine traffic as a result of blog marketing, SSL certificates, website loading time, referring domains, bounce rate.

5. Results and discussion

With the FsQCA method, we are analyzing the causal configuration (combinations of conditions) that determined the outcome of search engine traffic as seen on the semrush website. And as presented below the FsQCA

software generated two solutions resulted from the analysis for the Complex Solution, where all the reminders are set to false.

$$1. \text{srstf} = \text{bpf}^* \text{ssl}^* \sim \text{ltf}^* \text{ardf}$$

Is the first solution and this can be translated into search engine traffic as a result of the number of blog posts and SSL certificate on the e-commerce and not website loading time and the number of referring domains as seen on ahrefs. * ~ stands for not, this means that the result is calculated as 1-ltf.

$$2. \text{srstf} = \text{bpf}^* \sim \text{ltf}^* \text{ardf}^* \text{brf}$$

And the second solution is that the search engine traffic is equal to the number of blog posts and not website loading time and the number of referring domains as seen on ahrefs and the bounce rate as seen on Alexa.

Table 4. Complex solution for the FsQCA analysis

```

*****
*TRUTH TABLE ANALYSIS*
*****
Model: srstf = f(bpf, ssl, ltf, ardf, brf)
Rows: 14
Algorithm: Quine-McCluskey
True: 1
--- COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1.000000
consistency cutoff: 0.943787
      raw    unique
      coverage coverage consistency
      -----
bpf*ssl*~ltf*ardf  0.335827  0.069826  0.955082
bpf*~ltf*ardf*brf  0.339983  0.073982  0.955607
solution coverage: 0.409809
solution consistency: 0.962891
    
```


This solution has a consistency of 0.962 which is above the 0.8 recommended by Ragin [26] and a coverage of 0.40.

6. Conclusions and limitations

After analyzing the results, we conclude that developing an inbound marketing campaign using search engine optimization technique is a good strategy. However, we need to keep in mind that the solution coverage is at 0,41, this means that other factors need the researcher's attention as well.

This research was done on a small sample of 27 websites as Ragin [26] mentioned FsQCA is a Qualitative research method and the results are only applicable to this specific context. Several outcomes have been tested using social media indicators as input variables but the results have not been satisfactory to be included in this paper. Further research is needed in order to find causal conditions that include social media considering as one of the key components in inbound marketing.

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