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Mobile Technology Solutions in Business Communications – New Tools in Practical Implementation

Summary

The scientific purpose of the paper is a discussion of the theoretical framework concerning new channels of business communications as well as the logic of mobile communications and its characteristic devices. Attention was paid to the multidimensionality of media convergence and to the mobile technology development. The cognitive purpose of the study is to characterise the selected tools and multimedia applications, to co-create content and conduct an interactive dialogue with customers using mobile technology. Then the study provides practical examples of how to use the potential of mobile technologies in business communication processes. The application of the empirical method of case studies has made it possible to characterise the essence of mobile technologies and to illustrate the studied phenomenon in business practice. The research findings confirm the significant impact of mobile technologies on social networks, communication strategies, and customer's behaviour. The paper concludes with the practical recommendations and directions for a further research of future communication technologies. This is a research article.

Key words: business communications, interactivity, media convergence, mobile applications, mobile technology.

JEL codes: D83, M31, M37, O31, O33

Introduction

Mobile communication has become mainstream and even omnipresent. It is arguably the most successful and certainly the most rapidly adopted new technology in the world. Due to the possibilities of a widespread use of Information and Communication Technology tools by numerous entities, both mobility and interactivity of communication imply a number of changes in the functioning of both enterprises and social life. There even exists the so-called 'competition of speed', which constitutes an undeniable value in the virtual space and allows companies to respond to customer requests instantly. Mobile communication profoundly affects the tempo, structure, and process of daily life around the world (Katz 2008, p. 3). Technology is evolving at an exponential pace leading to new collaboration tools like Web 2.0 tools and social media (Kauffmann 2015, p. 60). Mobile technology also affects the way people interact when face-to-face or, rather and increasingly, face-to-face-to-mobile-phone-face, since people are ever more likely to include the mobile phone as a participant of communication (Katz and Aakhus 2002, p. 2).

In order to mark their appearance in the virtual world, companies are faced with the necessity of creating and developing new, interactive and highly diversified ways of communicating with multicultural environment functioning on the Internet. Communication and collaboration are an essential ingredients in the success of the organization (Boughzala et al. 2012). The research findings conducted by Dennis, Wixom and Vandenberg (2001) suggested that use of different collaboration technology could influence outcomes differently.

The scientific purpose of the paper is a discussion of the theoretical framework concerning new channels of business communication, as well as the logic of mobile communication and its characteristic devices. In the theoretical part attention was paid to the multidimensionality of media convergence and to the mobile technology development. The paper then describes the methods used for carrying out the study. The cognitive purpose of the study is to characterize selected tools and multimedia applications, to co-create content and conduct interactive dialogue with customers using mobile technology and devices. It has been assumed that mobile technology refers to the technology used for cellular communication. Due to the aim of the research and to illustrate the studied phenomenon in business practice a qualitative multiple case study analysis (Yin 2003) have been conducted. The study provides the examples of how to use the potential of mobile technologies in business communication processes. The research findings indicate the significant impact of mobile technologies on social networks, communication strategies, and customer's behavior. The paper concludes with the practical recommendations and directions for further research of future communication technologies.

Theoretical background

The Internet has certainly become a medium that has not only changed the world, but the way the world is evolving. The study of media convergence clarifies the multidimensionality of this phenomenon (Jenkins 2006). It is assumed that new tools and channels of communication are the result of the penetration of existing technologies on a common platform – technology, since the early twenty-first century. Firms have been subjected to the logic of the virtual world and its characteristic technologies linked to hypermedia environment. It creates a completely new, unprecedented quality for marketing communication: collection, storage, processing, presentation and transformation of information between senders and potential recipients of the message (Wiktor 2013, p. 248).

An important aspect in the development of interactive communication was Jenkins' "Convergence and Participatory Culture" (Jenkins 2006). The author suggested explaining the dimension of this phenomenon as a flow of content across different media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others (Jenkins 2006, p. 3).

Despite the lack of a clear conceptual apparatus for convergence, it is assumed that these are different forms of integration of telecommunications, data communications and mass communications, including integration of fixed and mobile networks (Kopecka-Piech 2011).

During 1980s and 1990s convergence was the subject of interest of many researchers who noticed that the previous media technologies had been integrated into new forms and information-communication content via remediation or absorption (Bassett 2008). Convergence is based on multimedia applications and software, which involve a remarkable diversity of expression (Badzińska 2013, p. 32). Multimedia relate to the integration of diverse forms of media to communicate unified messages, which are interactive in an ideal scenario. When they are presented with the use of hypertext links, digital media become ‚hypermedia' (Featherly 2013). The driving forces of this process include: Internet, e-business, multimedia applications, and mobile devices. Rapid development of multimedia applications and increased functionality of mobile devices both cause service convergence, which is manifested in offering an increasingly comprehensive services available through mobile devices.

The means of communication are particularly important in the development and maintenance of long-term relationships between partners. Mobile technologies have changed the relationship of participants in the communication process from "separation" to "integration and networking," and the distance between them has lost its significance. Turning to the user, called a participatory turn (Jenkins 2006), means not only the transfer of emphasis from the sender to the recipient, but also a new face of market communication: an increase in the importance of each potential user of new media. The popularization of technology and mobile devices urges users to search for new information and create connections between content distributed in different media, which in turn, contributes to building a network society.

Since the start of this millennium, a standard mobile device has gone from being no more than a simple two-way pager to being a cellular phone, GPS navigation system, an embedded web browser, instant messaging client, and a handheld game console. It includes the use of a variety of transmission media such as: radio wave, microwave, infra-red, GPS and Bluetooth to allow for the transfer of data via voice, text, video, 2-dimensional barcodes and more (Daichendt 2015). Mobile technology leads to great flexibility and mobile-to-mobile convergence (MMC) facilitates the interoperability of mobile communications devices without the need for any fixed capabilities or proprietary service provider. In MMC, a single cellular telephone, Smartphone or softphone-equipped device can switch automatically between Wi-Fi and cellular networks (mobile-to-mobile convergence 2015).

The penetration and unification of virtual and real worlds have had a significant impact on transformations in social relations. This is reflected both in the media and the possibilities of their use, in the behavior of customers and employees, in a changing approach to commercial transactions, and the methods of transmitting information (Badzińska 2013, p. 33). New technologies and mobile devices determine the way in which consumers acquire new knowledge, undertake commercial transactions and shape purchasing behavior. It is difficult to explain consumers' preferences exclusively by the perceived attractiveness of products' attributes, nevertheless it is a fact that attractiveness can have a significant influence on decisions taken by purchasers (Wanat 2008, p. 69). Therefore, the role and impact of mobile technology on communication process and trust in mobile commerce (Hoffman et al. 1999; Siau and Shen 2003) has been one of the most important topics for discussions in recent years. The researchers are looking for answers to questions: how mobile technol-

ogy has affected the quality of life, and why it increasingly occupies center stage in peoples lives around the world. They discuss the impact of mobile and multimedia communication on social networks, other communication strategies, traditional forms of social organization, and political activities (Katz and Aakhus 2002; Gurses and Akan 2005; Katz 2008; Khalil 2009). Technology acceptance research has tended to focus on instrumental beliefs such as perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as drivers of usage intentions, with technology characteristics as major external stimuli (Lu et al. 2005).

Research method

The first part of the study is of descriptive character and based on literature review, while the second part is empirical. For the purpose of this paper, a review of scientific literature has been conducted along with the analysis of secondary research results on the nature and importance of mobile technologies in communication processes. Attention has been drawn to the evolution of tools and channels of business communication and to the key areas of B2C communication in which mobile devices and mobile applications can be useful.

To achieving the cognitive purpose of this paper a qualitative multiple case study analysis (Yin 2003) have been conducted. The application of the empirical method of case studies has made it possible to characterize the essence of mobile technologies and illustrate the studied phenomenon in business practice. The examples of practical implementation of mobile technologies in communication processes were selected with a purposeful sampling technique (Merriam 1998; Maxwell 2005). The purposeful selection resulted from the clarity of the explained phenomenon and was aimed at identifying cases relevant to the research objectives (Czakon 2011). Both descriptive and explanatory techniques were used in the presented cases.

The research part identifies and analyzes innovative communication tools and presents the examples of initiating an interactive dialogue with customers by applying mobile solutions, which engage their users. Furthermore, the importance of the use of mobile channels of communication has been explained. They include: geolocation service, Quick Response code technology and Augmented Reality. The qualitative multiple case study analysis may provide a starting point for an in-depth empirical research and contribution to the discussion on the methodological dilemmas associated with conducting research in this area.

Research findings

Results

Mobile technology has changed the nature of the modern business communication. Widespread adoption of technology has also had significant effects on how businesses communicate, changing the way they converse with consumers, stakeholders and third parties.

The integration of mobile devices such as laptops, tablet, computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and smart phones, along with their various applications and software, make it easier for staff to collaborate and businesses to communicate with customers. Mobile technologies lead to new ways of working, and new products and services that can be offered on the B2C market. Furthermore, for consumers it has changed the path to purchase. The rapidly changing landscape of mobile technology presents a unique challenge to market communication.

The demand for access to business information and applications through mobile technologies such as the Apple iPhone and iPad, devices running Google Android and Windows 7 Mobile or using RIM Blackberry is surging as consumer preferences. The massive growth of adoption of these technologies around the world forces to answer the question: how to effectively position the company to benefit from the trend.

The drive for mobility is for most companies indispensable today. Mobile technology can be utilized to grow the business using Bluetooth and GPS technology. Mobile marketing is promotional activity designed for delivery to cell phones, smart phones and other handheld devices, usually as a component of a multi-channel campaign. Mobile marketing is not just to target teenagers; prime purchasers in the 35-44 and 45-54 age brackets are also strongly embracing the use of mobile (Daichendt 2015).

Some mobile marketing is similar to advertising delivered over other electronic channels such as text, graphic and voice messages. New mobile communication channels include for example GPS messaging, QR location-based service (LBS), which involves detecting the area the user is connecting from (geolocation) and sending marketing messages for businesses in that area. In turn, augmented reality mobile campaigns overlay the user's phone display with location-specific information about businesses and products.

New technology can be used to increase the productivity and lead to increased profitability. There are a lot of areas of business communication in which mobile technology can be useful: from the networking and development of mobile websites and applications through mobile commerce solutions to cloud computing and more flexible working practices using mobile devices. The development of various forms of mobile communication channels and relevant transformation into information technology instruments have become a hallmark of economic and social changes, as well as changes in searching, collecting, processing and communicating information.

Practical implementation of mobile technology

Innovative mobile devices allow for multimedia communication and expand the functionality and usability of communication in business practice. Smartphones have become an indispensable tool for interactive communication. Thanks to geolocation applications like Facebook Places or Foursquare message senders gain an opportunity to personalize the communication and influence their customers. It is a very effective way to engage customers with an appropriate stimulus, such as discount or a free gift, which can be obtained upon

checking in a place specified by the sender of the message (i.e. a pub, a shop, a shopping mall). There are a lot of mobile applications that help to find information about interesting events (e.g. concerts, cinemas, theaters), taking place a short distance away from the device. Holders of mobile devices are very valuable to businesses, because they can be found and contacted everywhere.

The example of a useful application – popular among the users of Smartphones – is "Jakdojade.pl". The application is a search engine of transport links which facilitate travel around the city. The service finds optimal interchange connections, changes in schedules, calculates time to walk and other parameters. With a brand name and quality products "Jakdojade.pl" has quickly become one of the most popular mobile applications in Poland. The product has been downloaded to a total of about 1.5 million devices and this application works in the 20 largest Polish cities (Kubiak 2015).

Communication activities on the B2C market involve more and more interesting applications of mobile technology in the form of QR codes, or graphic, two-dimensional, matrix, square codes, also called photo codes that are used to store text or binary information. After scanning the code (e.g. with a Smartphone) the user's device displays an address assigned to the code – it could be, for example, a mobile version of a website's current promotions. A big advantage of the QR code is its variable capacitance, so depending on the complexity of the information the code can change its area. QR code standardization has contributed to the development of appropriate applications for all most widely used mobile operating systems (Android, IOS, Windows Mobile, Blackberry, etc.). Photo codes can also be generated in order to gain fans over Facebook through QRCodeLike platform, where users are rewarded with electronic coupons and vouchers and free applications.

Huge potential of QR codes in the field of information storage, the attractiveness of graphic communication, fast reading and access to the stored information, and the growing availability of mobile devices that read the codes, all help to increase the popularity of this tool of communication. The promotional activities of companies include more and more interesting ideas for using QR codes in outdoor advertising and ambient media. Due to their wide possibilities of implementation QR codes can form an important part of the company's strategy to communicate with environment. An important role in business practice is undoubtedly played by non-standard forms of marketing communication in building corporate image and brand.

Another tool to improve the attractiveness of promotional activities and the image of enterprises (targeting the users of mobile devices), is a system of an interactive Augmented Reality (called AR) – a system that combines real images from the real world with elements created using information technology. Typically, an image from a portable camera gets overlapped with real-time 3D graphics. Unlike virtual reality, which is a completely new, imaginary 3D world, the augmented reality complements the real world known to the user by adding computer graphics and sound. These may be the elements of informative character, as well as promotional and entertainment types.

Through the use of AR, companies can move their promotional activities to a completely different dimension, offering services directly from their mobile devices. Along with the mobile application a customer receives a new and more engaging and attractive channel of communication. The condition for the access to augmented reality is to have both the appropriate software (e.g. Layar, Yelp), as well as an appropriate device. After collecting GPS sensor readings and the analysis of data from Smartphone camera, the device's screen displays information about selected places in the area with requisite additional data. Aiming the device at buildings will make it possible to display information about companies located there. It will also be possible to find in Wikitude information about objects in the vicinity (based on information from Wikipedia) or search Flickr for photos from a given location.

An example of the implementation of promotional activities with the use of augmented reality is a "Guide to the Night of Culture," an annual event in which cultural institutions in Lublin – artists and everyone who wants may revive the streets, alleys and districts of the city with artworks. The guide is based on the mechanism of geolocation (map) and augmented reality (Guide to the Night of Culture 2015). AR's wide range of application also exists in the area of replaying history and promoting city images. An example here is an application called "Warszawa'44 – Tracing the Warsaw Uprising with a cell phone." On the occasion of the 67th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising Smartphone users could see Warsaw as it was on August 1, 1944. After downloading the free app to a device, one could see an image from a camera enriched with archival photos and information associated with given places (Żur 2014). The use of the possibilities offered by the AR technology in conjunction with the viral campaign provides previously unattainable opportunities to promote products and corporate images.

An attractive area to use AR technology also seems to regard printed materials such as magazines, catalogs and brochures. The carrier of extended media can be both QR codes and product photos in a catalog or a magazine, packaging or any other images. Thanks to modern technologies printed materials cease to be a flat, two-dimensional medium. Pointing the Smartphone›s camera to an object in the directory will cause the screen to display a three-dimensional, colorful picture, and depending on the level of technological advancement it can be rotated or its color can be changed. An example of such use of augmented reality is furniture catalogs from IKEA. Their paper versions are supplemented by digital content supported by dedicated applications. The users of Smartphones and tablets running iOS and Android can download the free application, which allows three-dimensional view of furniture from the catalogue against the background of their own homes. To check whether the furniture fits inside, it is enough to just place the catalogue in a desired location and look at the Smartphone (Badzińska et al. 2015, pp. 49-53).

Similar functions are present in an application developed by Comarch under the theme «Furnish your future with Comarch». This is an interactive project for the furniture industry, which allows owners of furniture stores to present a wide range of home furnishings on a Microsoft Surface touch counter. Moreover, this application allows one to check a specific model of furniture in different colors and materials available. The second solution proposed by Comarch, namely "Furnish your office with Kinect" is based entirely on contactless

furnishings of the room in which we find ourselves, through a visualization on a monitor (Comarch R&D, 2015). By performing simple hand movements, it is possible to rotate and place furniture. It is also possible to move objects that do not exist in reality.

The use of mobile devices and modern information and communication technologies offers numerous opportunities to make contact with target customers and, above all, allows the use of their experience and opinions in the process of creating new or modifying the existing products and services. Innovative solutions submitted by Internet users – active consumers – constitute a base of ideas for companies and allow for better identification of the target group.

Conclusions and recommendations

The increasingly competitive conditions require not only the provision of information about oneself, about one's offer and strengths against competitors, but mainly the reception of various signals from the market regarding the trends of development, micro and macro-environment transformations and the needs and preferences of buyers, as well as appropriate responses to such trends. Interacting with and engaging the groups of target customers constitute a prerequisite of modern communication on the B2C market. The integration of information available online constitutes an added value customers can receive through interactive channels of communication and modern mobile devices. Changes in external conditions, however, necessitate continuous learning, updating one's knowledge and implementing mobile technologies in business. New relationships that exist between the bidders of goods and services, infrastructure, social communication and contemporary consumers require from businesses continued appropriateness of the communication strategy for the needs of the target group.

Communication on the B2C market involves such forms of interaction via mobile devices, which are based on granting voice to service users and hearing their opinions. In this way, companies receive opportunities to gather valuable information about their offer and can immediately respond to any hostile content appearing within the community, which may present a direct threat to the image of the brand.

An important communication channel for the B2C market is to build the company's image through mobile applications that ensure the implementation of the following two main objectives: mass and personalization, thus on the one hand, universal access to information, and on the other a personalized statement sent to a personal device. Promotional activities with the use of mobile applications must have a clearly defined time of arrival and the adequacy of the equipment, as well as the chance to catch the attention of recipients using interactive tools. A positive attitude towards mobile devices makes the promotional activities of companies, especially those based on neuromarketing techniques, reach a very fertile ground. Moreover, the ability to personalize one's Smartphone or tablet – an individual selection of interesting applications and content, makes it more susceptible to persuasion

transmitted via all these communication channels. It is also an effect of carrying over a positive emotional connection with one's personal carrier of information.

Regarding to IEEE Communications Society, as the next step in the continuous innovation and evolution of the mobile industry, broadband 5G services will not only be about a new air interface with faster speeds, but it will also address network congestion, energy efficiency, cost, reliability, and connection to billions of people and devices. Among the top future technologies are mentioned: Smartphones and connected devices, molecular communications, NetNeutrality, Internet governance, virtualization, and cognitive networks (Neira 2015).

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Technologia mobilna w komunikacji biznesowej – zastosowanie nowych narzędzi w praktyce

Streszczenie

Celem naukowym pracy jest dyskusja na temat teoretycznych aspektów w obszarze nowych kanałów komunikacji biznesowej, jak również zasadności prowadzenia komunikacji mobilnej i charakterystycznych dla niej urządzeń. Zwrócono uwagę na wielowymiarowość zjawiska konwergencji mediów i rozwój technologii mobilnej. Celem poznawczym pracy jest scharakteryzowanie wybranych narzędzi i rozwiązań multimedialnych, które służą współtworzeniu treści i prowadzeniu interaktywnego dialogu z klientami przez wykorzystanie technologii mobilnej.

Przedstawiono praktyczne przykłady implementacji rozwiązań mobilnych w procesie komunikacji biznesowej. Zastosowanie metody badawczej studium przypadku pozwoliło na scharakteryzowanie istoty technologii mobilnych i zilustrowanie badanego zjawiska w rzeczywistości gospodarczej. Wyniki badań potwierdzają istotny wpływ technologii mobilnych na kształtowanie sieci społecznych, strategii komunikacji i zachowań klienta. W podsumowaniu wskazano zalecenia praktyczne i kierunki dalszych badań w zakresie przyszłych technologii komunikacyjnych. Artykuł ma charakter badawczy.

Słowa kluczowe: komunikacja biznesowa, interaktywność, konwergencja mediów, aplikacje mobilne, technologia mobilna.

Kody JEL: D83, M31, M37, O31, O33

Мобильная технология в бизнес-коммуникации – применение новых инструментов на практике

Резюме

Научная цель разработки – дискуссия о теоретических аспектах в области новых каналов бизнес-коммуникации, а также о целесообразности осуществления мобильной коммуникации и характерных для нее устройств. Обратили внимание на многомерность явления конвергенции медиа и развития мобильной технологии. Познавательная цель работы – дать характеристику избранных инструментов и мультимедиальных решений, которые служат совместному созданию содержания и осуществлению интерактивного диалога с клиентами посредством использования мобильной технологии. Представили практические примеры внедрения мобильных решений в процессе бизнес-коммуникации. Применение в качестве исследовательского метода анализа конкретного случая позволило дать характеристику сути мобильных технологий и проиллюстрировать изучаемое явление в экономической действительности. Результаты изучения подтверждают существенное влияние мобильных технологий на формирование социальных сетей, стратегии коммуникации и поведения клиента. В подведении итогов указали практические рекомендации и направления дальнейших исследований в области будущих коммуникационных технологий. Статья имеет исследовательский характер.

Ключевые слова: бизнес-коммуникация, интерактивность, конвергенция медиа, мобильные приложения, мобильная технология.

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