A Critical Evaluation of the Influence of Creative Thinking on Marketing Creativity

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Due to the rapid technological development and a globally competitive business environment, creative marketing methods become increasingly important for a unique value proposition. As a result, the aim of this research paper is to critically evaluate the influence of creative thinking on marketing creativity. In order to evaluate this correlation, examples of creative marketing concepts in traditional marketing and online marketing campaigns are examined and analysed in regards to potentially required creative thinking processes. This evaluation led to the conclusion that creative thinking influences marketing creativity in a holistic way by creating experiences, forming relationships, and addressing large audiences in a cost-efficient way.

***Keywords:** Marketing, Creative Thinking, Marketing Creativity, Guerilla Marketing, Experiential Marketing, Online Marketing, Social Media*

***JEL Classification:** M31*

1. Introduction

Since the historical development from an understanding in which marketing was described as trading or distribution, marketing has become an important management discipline in the modern business world. In the early 1900s different schools of marketing originated from an intensified consideration of consumer needs and behaviour (Groucutt, et al., 2004). Moreover, recent developments in society and in business led to an increased acknowledgement of marketing in the literature of economics. Thereby, the steadily increasing demands of consumers and the increasing competition of organisations, also in terms of a global competition in the form of international competitors and imitators, led to an understanding of marketing as a competitive advantage (Hill and O'Sullivan, 2004).

These changes not only led to an increased importance of marketing, but also to an increased requirement of alternative and creative marketing ideas in order to set oneself apart from competitors and to convince potential customers who are already saturated from conventional marketing campaigns (Cesari and Lynch, 2011). This development led to several forms of creative marketing, such as guerrilla marketing, which attempt to attract customers in alternative ways (McNaughton, 2008). In order to invent and to implement creative marketing concepts, a transition from common marketing thinking towards a more creative way of thinking was necessary (Hill and O'Sullivan, 2004). As a result of that an understanding of creative thinking

and an implementation of creative thinking techniques and skills entered the creative marketing practice (Fillis, 2002).

2. The Intrinsic Relationship Between Marketing and Creative Thinking

This research paper is concerned with the question how marketing creativity benefits from creative thinking. This question is discussed under the assumption that creative marketing and creative thinking are intrinsically related. After a definition of the major terms, the benefits of creative thinking concerning different forms of creative marketing are examined. This analysis addresses creative forms of guerrilla marketing, offline marketing and online marketing. Although numerous forms of creative marketing exist, this research paper focuses on respectively two theories of online and offline marketing.

Thereby, the particular form of creative marketing is defined, the benefit of creative thinking for this marketing form is discussed, practical examples are given and a critical evaluation of the creative marketing forms in the context of creative thinking is conducted. In addition to that, marketing creativity is explored in the context of creative thinking as a whole area.

In order to analyse the benefit of creative thinking for marketing creativity, a definition of marketing, marketing creativity, respectively creative marketing and creative thinking, are crucial. Marketing can be defined as a management philosophy, rather than a function (Wind, 1997). The perception of a marketing philosophy leads to the definition of marketing as a construct of managerial processes that is about the attraction and maintenance of profitable customers (Hill and O'Sullivan, 2004).

Creative marketing can be defined as an alternative way of marketing, which is based on the application of creative viewpoints, which enables a combination of marketing and creativity (Fillis and Rentschler, 2006). Thereby, marketing creativity is necessary to implement creative marketing strategies (Slater, et al., 2010). Creative thinking can be defined as the procedure of gathering information and absent features in an alternative way, while phrasing hypotheses and conducting tests and evaluations of those hypothesis (Watson, 2007).

3. The Influence of Creative Thinking on Creative Marketing

Content with The following paragraphs examine different forms of creative marketing and explain how they can benefit from creative thinking. The first form of marketing that is based on marketing creativity and is examined in this research paper is guerrilla marketing. Guerrilla marketing is a form of marketing that utilizes unconventional methods in a cost-effective way. The main purpose is to promote products or services in the most efficient way while remaining low costs (Levinson, 2007). Guerrilla marketing introduces a change in the goal of reaching a preferably high audience towards a marketing that enables ideal positioning and impact (Levinson and Godin, 1994). Guerrilla marketing utilizes unconventional methods in order to achieve conventional goals, such as high profit (Levinson, 2007).

When looking at several practical examples the benefit of creative thinking for guerrilla marketing is evident. A demand of creative thinking is implicit, when considering the fact that the goal of guerrilla marketing is to save costs in comparison with traditional marketing approaches (Levinson, 2007). According to Morris et al. (2002) marketers have to make use of their imagination and their creativity in order to develop ways that are more efficient and more cost-effective than the measures of the competition.

Furthermore, the principle of guerrilla marketing is based on unconventional ideas and actions, which involves a form of creativity. This is supported by Runco (1996) who claim that the development of creativity contains a transition from conventional thinking to unconventional thinking. In addition to that, the purpose of an ideal positioning and impact require certain skills and tactics that facilitate those circumstances. On the one hand, creative ways of forming relationships and addressing potential customers enable the preferred impact (Law, 2003). On the other hand a creative market orientation and target orientation supports the desired positioning (Im and Workman, 2004).

3.1. Guerrilla Marketing and Creative Thinking

As a practical example that illustrate the impact of creative thinking on marketing creativity in form of a guerrilla marketing project, the company Coca-Cola can be quoted. Coca Cola conducted several guerrilla marketing campaigns, such as the Coca-Cola Dancing Vending Machine, where people have to dance in front of a screen in order to receive a free drink or the Coca-Cola Happiness Machine which was first tested in a university (Levinson, 2007). The Coca-Cola Happiness Machine provided more drinks than customers paid

for, so that they could share them with their fellow students. With such guerrilla marketing campaigns Coca-Cola fulfilled the goal of guerrilla marketing to enable a high impact on the customer relationship and an, ideal positioning, while providing a cost-efficient marketing (Canan, 2010). These guerrilla marketing campaigns became so popular that they went viral and reached in addition to the initial target market potential customers all over the world, without any additional marketing costs for Coca-Cola (Moore, 2003).

Regarding the critical evaluation of the benefit of creative thinking for guerrilla marketing it is recognizable that the measurement of creative thinking itself is not obvious (Hocevar, 1981). Therefore, its impact on marketing creativity in guerrilla marketing proves to be quite difficult. According to research, the area of creative thinking lacks accuracy due to the imprecise definition of creativity (Finke, et al., 1992). Despite this critique of creative thinking as a concept, the success of guerrilla marketing campaigns can be linked to the creativity that is involved (Levinson, 1993). However, it can be stated that exaggerated application of creative thinking might result in marketing campaigns that cause ethical issues (Canan, 2010).

3.2. Experiential Marketing and Creative Thinking

Regarding creative thinking in the context of experiential marketing, its influence is apparent. Schmitt (1999) distinguishes in various experiential models, whereby one model is described as creative cognitive experience. According to Adeosun and Ganiyu (2012) a creative cognitive experience can be described as an experience that is processed in a creative way by the act of thinking about this particular experience. The area of creative cognitive experience connects creative thinking with experiential marketing by designing experiences that address the customers in an intellectual way (Kazançoğlu, 2014). According to Kazançoğlu (2014) preferably problem-solving experiences are utilized. The fact that both the design of problem-solving experiences and the solving of problems predominantly demand creativity, demonstrates the benefit that experimental learning derives from creative thinking (Runco, 1994). When not only observing creative cognitive experiential learning as a segment of experiential marketing, but the marketing form as a whole concept, the influence of creative thinking is also recognizable (Schmitt, 1999). This is supported by Smith et al. (1997) who claim that experiences, which is the main aspect of experimental marketing, encourage creative thinking. As an example for experiential marketing that focuses on a creative cognitive experience the "where do you want to go today?" marketing campaign from Microsoft, which advertised technology in a humanistic way, can be mentioned (Schmitt, 1999). According to Brady (2001) this is an innovative example of creative experiential marketing.

Regarding street art and its benefit through creative thinking it is noticeable that the planning and making of such an artwork involves creative thinking. Street art itself is the expression of creative thoughts of the artist (Schacter, 2008). The development of street art from a way of an expression of politically appreciable content towards an increased utilization in marketing led to a commercialisation of street art (Twitchell, 1996). This increased focus on commercial street art, which is primarily designed to attract attention in the context of marketing campaigns, led to an increase of creative thinking in the modern marketing theory. This is supported by Brown (1993), who claims that unconventional marketing forms, such as street art, have an impact on the understanding of creativity in marketing. As an example for street art in advertising the automotive company BMW can be named. BMW designed a three-dimensional street art picture, in which a BMW seems to drive out of the ground (Bell and Goodwin, 2012). According to Kriegesmann et al. (2007) BMW encourages their employees to think creatively, which affects their marketing.

Regarding the critical evaluation of the benefit of creative thinking for offline marketing, such as experiential marketing and street art, it is recognizable that offline marketing is not only creative but has also the benefit of an increased focus on interpersonal relationships (O'Driscoll and Fahy, 2002). Marketing creativity can be seen as a competitive advantage but according to Fillis (2002) creativity gains more importance in the online sector than in the offline sector. This might result in the assumption that even if offline marketing, such as experiential marketing and street art can benefit from creative thinking, it benefits from creative marketing to a lesser extent than online marketing. In terms of offline marketing the focus on relationship building and interpersonal experiences exceeds creative thinking in importance (Wang, 2005).

4. The Influence of Creative Thinking on Online Marketing

The examination of the benefit of creative thinking for online marketing includes the marketing forms viral marketing and social media marketing. Viral marketing can be defined as a form of marketing that utilizes either technology or human interactions in order to distribute a particular message in form of self-replication through external sources (Leskovec, et al., 2007). The objective is to create a viral message that is distributed

to a preferably extensive audience employing minimum costs and resources (Cruz and Fill, 2008). Social media marketing can be described as a procedure of advertising products or services through content creation that causes an increased sharing through social networks (Evans and Bratton, 2012). The goal of viral marketing is to build a foundation of trust with potential customers through third-party recommendations (Zarrella, 2009).

4.1. Viral Marketing and Creative Thinking

The benefit of creative thinking for viral marketing is identifiable when considering the viral messages, which for example spread through videos, pictures or textual content on websites. According to Dobele et al. (2005) the conduction of viral marketing projects requires imaginative power and constructiveness. Those attributes are closely related to the ability of creative thinking and implementing creative thinking in practical measures (Osborn and Bristol, 1979). Furthermore, research has shown that there is a positive correlation between creativity and the impact the viral message has on the sharing behaviour on social media platforms (Thackeray, 2008). As an example for viral marketing that puts creative thinking into practice, the marketing campaign for the remake of the horror movie "Carrie", can be mentioned. Thereby, the marketing team created a scenario with actors, in which a girl gets angry in a coffee shop and demonstrates her telekinetic powers. The video of this marketing campaign went viral on YouTube. According to Ferguson (2008) the majority of viral marketing videos get featured on online video platforms, such as YouTube.

4.2 Social Media Marketing and Creative Thinking

Regarding social media marketing, the benefit of creative thinking can be detected by observing the predominant social media platforms. The most widely used platforms that enable social media marketing are Facebook and Twitter (Hannaa, et al., 2011). According to Bodnar and Cohen (2012) LinkedIn became the most important social media platform for professionals, especially in due consideration to business to business marketing. In order to achieve the goal of increased sharing through social media platforms, social media marketing campaigns should be based on creativity. This is supported by Mangold and Faulds (2009) who claim that creative and unconventional content provokes emotions in potential customers, which consequently leads to an increased sharing on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

On the other hand, creative thinking is necessary in order to create content that is creative enough to be shared among social media users (Vass, et al., 2008). As an example for a successful social media activity one simple tweet from the cookie company Oreo can be mentioned. Oreo reacted immediately on the electricity cut during the Super Bowl 2013 with a simple creative tweet, which advertised the fact that cookies can also be eaten in the dark (Taylor, 2013). This caused an immense social media attention (Taylor, 2013).

A critical evaluation of online marketing, such as viral marketing and social media marketing, reveals that the need for creativity is even higher than in offline marketing, due to an absence of interpersonal relationships (Fillis, 2002). This is supported by Mangold and Faulds (2009) who claim that both viral and social media marketing require creative thinking in order to achieve the deliberate results. A possible disadvantage that might result from an excessive utilization of creativity is that the content might get viral or get shared through social media platforms, but the message undergoes disregard (Hemphill, 2002). It can be stated that creative forms of online marketing benefit from creative thinking, on condition that the core message is communicated unambiguously (Dobele, et al., 2005).

5. Marketing Creativity as a Holistic Concept

After the examination of different marketing forms, such as guerrilla marketing, creative offline marketing and creative online marketing, marketing creativity is analysed in the context of creative thinking as a holistic concept. According to Proctor (1999) every form of marketing creativity requires creative thinking. Creative thinking can be regarded as a requirement for the creation of creative marketing measures (Yadin, 2001). Moreover, the skill to think creatively is a crucial ability of marketers and therefore it can be stated that marketing practitioners put their creative thinking skills into practice when designing marketing concepts (Fillis, 2000). This is also supported by Titus (2000) who even claims that marketing itself is a creative process. Therefore, any form of marketing benefits from creative thinking (Titus, 2000).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that marketing creativity benefits from creative thinking in many ways. This benefit is not only recognizable in terms of creative marketing as a whole concept but also when analysing

different forms of creative marketing. Without exception, all examined forms of creative offline marketing, creative online marketing and guerrilla marketing reveal that creative thinking is beneficial for the design and implementation of those marketing forms. Thereby, creative thinking benefits marketing creativity by addressing large audiences in a cost-efficient way, creating experiences and forming relationships, attracting attention, spreading messages and encouraging social sharing. Besides minor criticism that advices against an exaggerated use of creativity, the examination has revealed that marketing creativity benefits from creative thinking.

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