

Services Marketing in the Era of Disruption and Digital Transformation

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Abstract

Recent sound academic research reconfirmed that at the core of many successful service firms is an adequate services marketing (people, technology, strategy) approach by building the relationships and maintaining loyal customers within the targeted, acquired, and retained segments, beyond their necessary but not sufficient satisfaction, better understanding the drivers of customer churn, and acting accordingly, using an effective CRM strategy. Two years have passed since the World Economic Forum launched the project “The Digital Transformation Initiative (DTI)” as part of the “System Initiative on Shaping the Future of Digital Economy and Society”, and at the beginning of this year the World Economic Forum in collaboration with Accenture already published the white paper “Digital Transformation Initiative. Aviation, Travel and Tourism Industry”, by highlighting, among other aspects, the importance for the companies along the Aviation, Travel and Tourism industry journey of optimizing customer experience (CX) by collecting and exchanging data, and continuously generating insights. There is no doubt that the current modern marketing landscape has been redefined by faster changing technologies and customer expectations, and it has become essential having a capability of testing fast new ideas, refining them, and bringing them rapidly to the relevant market, better understanding the customer journeys and delivering a great CX, by building out a maturity model for CX. There is a real need of a holistic approach of revenue management and its relation to agile marketing, considering the tourist experience in the current customer-driven era. Recent evidence comes in favor of successful service firms which are moving further in the direction of: so-called experiential offerings as differentiation strategy by optimizing experience for sizable groups of “connected” traveling customers; focusing on high priority CX initiatives involving big-data or technology interventions which improve traveler perceptions; using algorithms which provides tailored travel recommendations by drawing data from users’ social media; winning the social media fights by right managing online sentiments and so on.

Keywords: Aviation, Travel and Tourism Industry; Services Marketing; Disruption; Digital Transformation; CRM strategy; CX initiatives

JEL Classification: L83; M31; O33

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Introduction: *MLIBCW, actually valuable topics on the Academic & Business Partnership*

The Conference “*Management, Leadership and Innovation towards a Better Changing World*” (MLIBCW) is continuing to build on the progress made through capitalization of scientific research results achieved in the tourism and related areas, stimulating technological development and innovation efforts for the applicability of scientific research results, and strengthening the collaboration between the academic research environment and the economic environment by promoting interdisciplinary research. This year’s MLIBCW Conference reinforced its key message, challenging participants to come up with great contributions.

As its name implies, MLIBCW Conference is focused on the key message of committing to building a Better Changing World through an adequate approach to Management, Leadership and Innovation. The Father of *Management*, Peter Drucker (considered also to be the Grandfather of Modern Marketing by Philip Kotler, the Father of Modern Marketing, on the occasion of Drucker Celebration in November 20, 2009, in Vienna), teaches us that: “*The purpose of a business is to create a customer;*” “*Business has only two functions - marketing and innovation. All the rest are costs;*” “*The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself;*” “*The aim of marketing is to make selling unnecessary;*” “*The best way to predict the future is to create it;*” “*The entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and exploits it as an opportunity.*” (Kotler, 2009)

At the beginning of the 50’s Drucker highlighted in his book “The Practice of Management” (1954, p. 37 - Harper Business, October 3, 2006) that: “What business thinks it produces is not of first importance-especially not to the future of the business or to its success. What the customer thinks he/she is buying, what he/she considers « value » is decisive - it determines what a business is, what it produces, and whether it will prosper.” It was a pity that his wise words were often neglected.

But as the Roman poet Virgil said: “Time passes irrevocably”. And today we are already speaking about “*Management’s next frontier: Making the most of the ecosystem economy*”, finding out that businesses need a new set of managerial skills and capabilities in order to engage in digital ecosystems, knowing that an ecosystem must have a compelling value proposition (which is attractive, open, and relevant to multiple businesses) to be successful. Within this new framework, the investment in building an ecosystem relationship-management (ERM) capability with dedicated staff is an unavoidable requirement. (Meffert and Swaminathan, 2017)

At the beginning of the 21st Century and the third Millennium, while approaching “Management vs. Leadership” topic (Planning & budgeting vs.

Setting the direction; Organizing & staffing vs. Aligning people; Controlling & problem solving vs. Motivating people) it was again underlined that if *Management* is about coping with *complexity*, *Leadership* is about coping with *change*. (Gonzalez, 2002) *Change?* The famous Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876 - Hobita, Romania, 1957 - Paris), and August Rodin's disciple said that: *"To see far is one thing, going there is another;" "What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things."*

On the other hand, the reputed Management and Leadership consultant Tom Peters – recently recognized with a Lifetime Achievement Award from Thinkers50, a well-known organization that ranks management thinkers, founded by Stuart Crainer and Des Dearlove, the reputed authors of many popular books and editors of the Financial Times Handbook of Management (Mosca, 2017) – attracted our attention on the fact that excellent firms believe only in constant improvement and *constant change*. Former Navy Seabee and McKinsey partner, Tom Peters argued in September 2014 that today we are in the *"big-change business,"* where change is not about overcoming resistance, but about: *"recruiting allies and working each other up to have the nerve to try the next experiment;" "giving reinforcement at precisely the right moment."* (Heywood et al, 2014)

Seven month later, in May 2015, McKinsey's representatives underlined, among other aspects, that: *"... we tend to be slow to adapt to change... There is a powerful human tendency to want the future to look much like the recent past... Gaining a clear-eyed perspective on how to negotiate the changing landscape will help us prepare to succeed."* (Dobbs et al, 2015) And in July 2015 other McKinsey's representatives highlighted that a critical competitive advantage is now *mastering the art of changing quickly*, and that *in order to accelerate and amplify the ability of an organization to change it can be helpful to digitize five areas* (provide just-in-time feedback; personalize the experience; sidestep hierarchy; build empathy, community, and shared purpose; demonstrate progress). (Ewenstein et al, 2015)

While in the same year, in September 2015, Jeffrey Pfeffer, a reputed Professor (of Organizational Behavior, Career & Success, Leadership, Management) at Stanford Graduate School of Business, Finalist for the 2015 Financial Times and McKinsey Business Book of the Year, considered by "The Economist" as one of the great management thinkers of our time, and also well-known author of "Power: Why Some People Have It and Others Don't" (HarperBusiness, 1 edition, September 14, 2010), showed in a new book – entitled "Leadership BS: Fixing Workplaces and Careers One Truth at a Time" (HarperBusiness, September 15, 2015) – *"how leadership really works and why so many leadership development efforts fail,"* arguing that: *"much of the oft-repeated wisdom about leadership is based more on hope than reality, on wishes*

rather than data, on beliefs instead of science,” and recommending a better understanding of the realities of organizations and human behavior, going *“beyond the half-truths and self-serving stories that are so prominent in the mythology of leadership.”* (Pfeffer, 2015) He was recognized as pledging for “facts culture”, for doing the right thing. (Hill, 2015)

Also in September 2015, analyzing the making large-scale organizational changes (as suggested by the results from a new McKinsey Global Survey), other McKinsey’s representatives approached the topic of “The science of organizational transformations,” pointing out that *change efforts are hard work*, implementation being critical to overall transformation success, while critical to shifting mind-sets and behaviors being *four key actions* (role modeling, fostering understanding and conviction, reinforcing changes through formal mechanisms, and developing talent and skills). They pledged for focused transformations by treating design as a science, involving multiple stakeholders, considering the above mentioned elements along with complementary initiatives aligned with the broader organizational context. (Basford et al, 2016)

A debate organized by McKinsey Quarterly in March 2016, and approaching the topic of “Leading in the digital age,” revealed that *“the automation of work and the digital disruption of business models place a premium on leaders who can create a vision of change and frame it positively.”* And a month later, in April 2016, to help companies to understand the opportunities and threats faced by them, *McKinsey & Company* recommended *its supply and demand guide to digital disruption* (undistorted demand; unconstrained supply; new market-making; new value proposition; reimagined business systems; hyperscaling platforms).

So, it is not by chance that other McKinsey’s representatives approached more recently, in February 2017 the topic of “The seven decisions that matter in a digital transformation: A CEO’s guide to reinvention”, considering that the defining challenge for today’s generation of CEOs is Digital. Pledging for *reinvention by digital transformation of the core – value proposition, people, processes, and technologies* (which are the lifeblood of the business) – they recommended seven decisions (occurring in four phases) for a successful digital transformation program. (Dahlström et al, 2017)

Within this framework we also have to remember that:

- *digital disruption* “happens when an existing industry faces a challenger that offers greater value to the customer in a way that existing firms cannot compete with directly”, (Rogers, 2016) *digital transformation* being the “realignment of, or new investment in, technology and business models to more effectively engage digital customers at every touchpoint in the customer experience lifecycle” (as defined by Brian Solis, a principal analyst at Altimeter Group); (Tarling, 2017)

- according to the reputed James McQuivey, Forrester's Vice President, Principal Analyst, serving CMO professionals, and author of "Digital Disruption: Unleashing the Next Wave of Innovation," (McQuivey, 2013) *companies must disrupt their products and processes in order to enable the next customer experiences*; (McQuivey, 2014)

- according to Lisa Bodell, an award-winning author and CEO of Futurethink (who as a futurist and expert on the topic of change serves as a global council member of the World Economic Forum), it is very important to understand what is happening at *the intersection of innovation and disruption*; (Bova, 2017)

- according to Henrique Schneider, Chief Economist, Swiss Federation of SME, Switzerland, and author of "*Creative Destruction and the Sharing Economy: Uber As Disruptive Innovation*," (Schneider, 2017) while *creative destruction*, one hand, means "*the overall process of change and adaptation of actual industries to novelties*," on the other hand *disruptive innovation* is "*primarily technology-backed innovation starting at the low end of markets or creating a new market foothold*," disruptive innovation making it impossible for the marker processes to exist without it; (Schneider, 2017)

- the term (concept in economics) "*creative destruction*" was coined in 1942 by the great economist Joseph Schumpeter, who was a Peter Drucker's Family friend in Wien, being well-recognized Schumpeter's tremendous influence on Drucker.

And as for Peter Drucker "*Innovation*" is "*change that creates a new dimension of performance*," allow us to also remember that:

- on the occasion of a new edition of the Forum Entreprises 2.0 (Productivity, Growth and Technologies) organized on November 5, 2014 at Montreal's Palais des congrès by "Technologia" (Québec training leader since 1996), and moderated by Martin Cloutier, associate and organizational psychologist at SPB Organizational Psychology, it was underlined that *innovation must be an organizational priority* (according to Marc-André Bovet, CEO of Bone Structure), and *combine processes, specialized labor, tools and systems* on the most advanced stage in the development, *Big Data making it possible to provide every customer with a tailored product or service* (according to Yves Harvey, a Microsoft specialist), *a key factor in the innovation process being change management*; (Cloutier, 2014)

- McKinsey's representatives identified in 2015 the "*eight essentials of innovation*:" *Aspire, Choose, Discover, Evolve, Accelerate, Scale, Extend, Mobilize* (the first four being considered as strategic and creative in nature, helping setting and prioritizing the terms and conditions under which innovation is more likely to thrive; the next four essentials being considered as dealing with

how to deliver and organize for innovation repeatedly over time and with enough value to contribute meaningfully to overall performance); according to them, when it comes to innovation there's no proven formula for success: *"In the digital age, the pace of change has gone into hyperspeed, so companies must get these strategic, creative, executional, and organizational factors right to innovate successfully;"* (De Jong et al, 2015)

- at the level of The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB, Washington, D.C., the premier organization centered on governance in higher education, founded in 1921) – that pledges for a *"Culture of Innovation"* – it was recently highlighted *"The Innovation Imperative"* (September/October 2017), being considered that: *"Innovation is the watchword in higher education today, the antidote for what ails a sector confronting one of the most disruptive eras in memory."*

All of the above mentioned issues entitled us to propose a more nuanced approach, so as to be managed as a project for a better change, starting from a better understanding of how these topics are actually valuable and helpful for the Tourism and Aviation Industry, ensuring information sharing and the development of new ideas and thoughts within the Academic & Business Partnership, even stimulating controversial ideas, while trying to build a support for new knowledge, and also hopping to have the necessary feedback to go farther, strongly believing in the role played by every person involved in the inspired MLIBCW debate, on the way of Digital Transformation. We appreciate that there is now clear evidence of the current heavy competition and the increasing disruptors' pressure on the relevant market (the existing business models being disrupted by digitization), which has made it necessary for incumbents to focus more on services marketing, on distribution and merchandising, on shopping experience, on customer and brand experience, while enabling the Digital Supply Chain by using new technologies at different points of their value chain, and not anyway but in new, different ways.

Abundance of Information, the 3 V's of Information, and Data, the Catalyst for Digital Transformation in a VUCA World. Lessons to learn for the Industry

Paraphrasing social scientist Herbert Simon, we can say, within the current abundance of information, that in our information-rich world information consumes the attention of its recipients, this wealth of information creating a poverty of attention. (Brisbourne, 2009) So, we have to pay attention to... also what Bill Gates pointed out seventeen years ago: *"How you gather, manage, and use information will determine whether you win or lose."* (Gates, 1999)

Early in 1989, Bill Gates vigorously supported the cause of the 70s motto of the Information Industry Association – "Putting Information at Your Fingertips",

transforming it in his more important than any other goal for the next two decades (“Information At Your Fingertips - 2005,” COMDEX keynote speech, 1994) – and step by step we were witnessing how all kind of devices gave rise to ecological computing and information surfacing, to ubiquitous computing, and how pervasive computing became transparent computing. (McFedries, 2009) Coming back to the always challenging present, allow us to show that already in April 2015 it was a clear evidence of different determined efforts to deal with the 3 V’s of information (Volume, Velocity and Variety), being also underlined that: “The technology today enables faster decision making, but it also requires the ability to change existing operating models faster when required.” (Nikula, 2015) Two months later, in July/August 2015, at the level of the above mentioned premier organization centered on governance in higher education, AGB, it was highlighted that: “... *we are entering an era of information abundance driven by increasingly mobile and ubiquitous information technology and its partner in disruption, “big data” – large digital databases that allow information to be aggregated, tracked, and manipulated in ways that were impossible in the past.*” (Smith, 2015)

On September 9, 2016, something to be seriously considered in dealing with *the new reality of leadership in a turbulent environment* – the turbulence described by VUCA (an acronym coined by the U.S. Army, and representing: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) appearing to be confirmed by market data – and *building on the essential skills to the tomorrow’s leaders*, has been approached at a conference at the International Congress of Human Resources (held in Montreal, and hosted by Julie Carignan, CHRP, Organizational Psychologist and Senior Partner at the above mentioned SPB), where it was underlined, among other aspects, that: the decisions makers need both to understand and deal with the quantity and quality of available information, and to decide on its immediate usefulness (taking into account the volatility, the quantity and the complexity of the involved information); *in a VUCA world, a leader needs to anticipate change and to be a visionary, in other words to confirm the competence of agility, maintaining the balance between feedback and feedforward (by making requests or proposing future-oriented solutions), inspiring trust and fostering and proving commitment, initiating action, unlocking collective creativity, and innovating, quickly assessing results.* (Therrien, 2016) The just before mentioned SPB’s article approached finally the key issue of managing information as part of the decision-making process, revealing that while the human brain has a memory capacity of only one gigabyte approximately, the amount of information people are getting per day is of 35 gigabytes, *this amount of information becoming increasingly developed thanks to social networks.* It is well-known that *social networks* are business and/or social contacts made by connections through individuals (often through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+), fostering the relationships at the

level of this network of fans/followers, while social media, as another important marketing tactics, represent forms of electronic communication (for example, Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities (so as to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content as videos), trying to drive engagement. (Schauer, 2015) A map of the world's most popular social networks (ranked 1st and 2nd) is shown below: (Hutt, 2017)

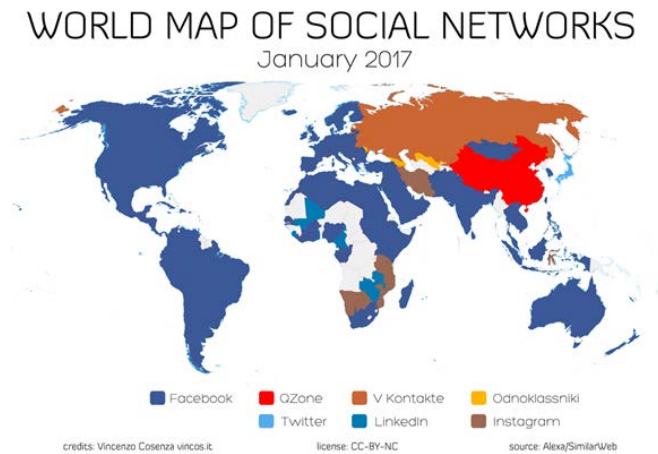


Figure 1: World map of social networks, January 2017 (Image: Social media strategist Vincenzo Cosenza)

Source: Hutt, R. (2017). The world's most popular social networks, mapped (cited work)

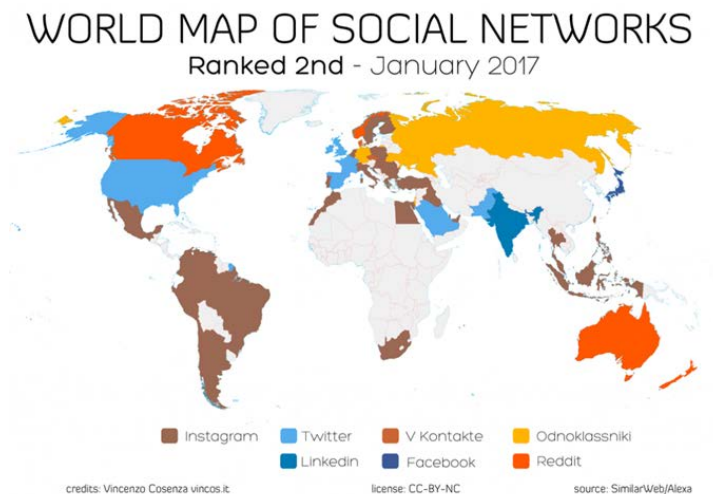


Figure 1: World map of social networks, Ranked 2nd - January 2017 (Image: Social media strategist Vincenzo Cosenza)

Source: Hutt, R. (2017). The world's most popular social networks, mapped (cited work)

Today (after 25 years since Tim Berners-Lee made the “World Wide Web” available to the public), (Kemp, 2017) as 66% of the world uses mobile devices, marketers absolutely need to have a mobile-first strategy in place (91% of social media users accessing social platforms via mobile devices) applied to a brand’s overall online experience (not only to social media marketing but also). (Forer, 2017) According to the cited infographic by Marketo and Salesforce consultants Grazziti Interactive, based on a report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, in 2017 there are 2.8 billion global social media users (27% of the world).

In October 2015, a Phocuswright White Paper entitled “Influencing Travelers in the New Digital Funnel,” and made with the active support of Amadeus IT Group (leading provider of advanced technology solutions for the global travel industry), drawn a pertinent conclusion: “... today’s travel companies have unprecedented opportunities to engage and influence travelers. As *mobile adoption continues to grow, device choice is likely to play a key role in swaying channel selection. Metasearch may be just one of the technology-driven disruptors to come.* But the gold standard in influencing travelers remains simple: *Give the people what they want. The travel brands that win in the years to come will be those that succeed in delivering the services travelers seek at the moment they are seeking them.*”

It is also good to remember that as early as September 2016 our attention was drawn by an article in the prestigious Harvard Business Review entitled “The businesses that platforms are actually disrupting”, and that showed, among other aspects that: “Platforms are all the rage these days. Powered by online technologies, they are sweeping across the economic landscape, striking down companies large and... so we have 13 online platforms. All but one of these new matchmakers directly disrupted an existing platform industry. *Airbnb is the one exception. It has mainly disrupted the hotel chains, which are not platforms, but it may well disrupt online booking sites, which are.*” (Evans and Schmalensee, 2016) Seven month later, in March 2017, the Director of Digital Marketing at Travel Tripper (a provider of award-winning hotel booking technology and full-service digital marketing and distribution solutions; Central Reservations System - CRS, booking engine, websites, and more) showed, among other aspects, how *Google’s (which makes \$12+ billion per year on advertising from travel industry alone) focus customer is actual search users, ensuring them in the quickest way the wanted information*, what means that many digital marketers in travel are creating ads that people want to click on. (Heaword, 2017) Two month later, the Marketing Director at Travel Tripper interviewed (a Skift’s interview) Facebook’s Head of Travel Christine Warner (which described Facebook as a “discovery platform” and Instagram as “a place for inspiration” - terms used by Google in its own “micro-moments” language), and revealed that Facebook is aiming to

become a force in the booking journey (with the help of Dynamic Ads for Travel and the recent release of City Guides): “... *Facebook (an early influencer) has the potential to be a major travel industry platform in its own right, and it’s starting to offer an array of marketing and direct booking opportunities for hotels...* Facebook’s own study found that *consumers make 56 visits to travel-related digital touchpoints across devices...*” (Huang, 2017)

More recently, the European Traveler Technology Survey 2017 (Series), published in October 2017, confirmed that the nature of the travel experience itself is transformed by technology, European travelers continuing to evolve in using mobile devices (before, during and after their trips), and embracing a range of websites, apps and services to facilitate their trip planning, purchasing and sharing (considering technological advancements in terms of the travel-related functionality available to consumers at home and on-the-go). Also in October 2017, an analyst from the well-known provider of travel, tourism and hospitality market research Phocuswright showed that one of the fastest-growing segments of the world’s largest travel site TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor, Inc., NASDAQ: TRIP; includes 24 other travel media brands that operate in 48 markets worldwide) – having the largest online marketplace of both supply and demand – is Tours & Activities (Phocuswright predicting that travelers will spend \$147 billion in 2017 on tours, activities and attractions worldwide, considering TripAdvisor’s lots of work still to do to make listings online bookable). (Quinby, 2017) The Phocuswright’s analyst also drawn the attention in the same month on the so-called “Modern Road Warrior” (a hipster term for the modern traveling salesman) considered as travel’s most coveted bunch, seriously impacting the tourism and aviation industry (at least eight business trips each year, and representing 16% of all U.S. business travelers). (Quinby, 2017)

Within the context of the challenge of embracing digitization, the leader in real-time customer data solutions, enterprise tag management and unified marketing, Tealium, drawn our attention in June 2017 to the once-futuristic technologies’ real impact on CX, the catalyst for digital transformation being data, and invited us to view Gartner’s research note “100 Data and Analytics Predictions for 2021”. According to Tealium, the new report’s predictions (Tealium has partnered with Gartner to round up the top data and analytics predictions) offer an in-depth view of the key themes of a necessary digital transformation’s approach so as to ensure a positive transition. And as a data-driven business adopts data as a strategic resource, it is worth mentioning *Tealium Case Study* entitled “*TUI Start their Journey to Data Excellence. Building a Data Driven Business,*” taking into account that in early 2017, *the world’s number one tourism business* (well-known for its unique hotel portfolio, cruise lines, six European airlines, the distribution strength of their tour operators, both online and through their travel agencies all over Europe), *TUI*, purchased *Tealium DataAccess* which: is acting as an extension

of Tealium iQ and AudienceStream; has given TUI the ability to consume clean, relevant data about their visitors within their data warehouse and chosen business intelligence tools. The results of using the recommended solution – Tealium Universal Data Hub – were impressive.

But as according to Stijn Viaene, Full Professor and Partner at Vlerick Business School in Belgium, Director of the school's Digital Transformation strategic focus area (also a Professor in the Decision Sciences and Information Management Department at KU Leuven), "*Digital Reality No.1*" is "*Customer Experience is Value*" (value being attributed to the total experience of engaging with customers in ways that fit with their modern connected, mobile and social lives, the new normal being given by access and convenience), (Viaene, 2017) allow us to come with a recent example of CX approach at the level of a reputed travel company as Thomas Cook Group. On August 15, 2017, Jeanne Bliss, the Founder and President of CustomerBliss, and the Co-Founder of The Customer Experience Professionals Association (one of the foremost experts on customer-centric leadership and the role of the Chief Customer Officer; pioneered the role of the Chief Customer Officer, holding the first ever CCO role at Lands' End, Microsoft, Coldwell Banker and Allstate Corporations), approached the topic of "*CX Design Thinking in the Travel Industry*," with Annette Höher-Bäuerle, Group Customer Experience Director for the Thomas Cook Group, who built out together with her team a maturity model for customer experience (first re-assessment of where they are will occur at the end of this year, hoping to have a fully mature model by the end of 2019); the experiment consisted of launching a 24-hour promise product within Destination (on a smaller scale in some hotels), clearly defining pain points, and considering "quick wins" important (Thomas Cook deals with customers on holiday), and achieving finally an increase of NPS/customer satisfaction scores. (Bliss, 2017)

So, there are many lessons to learn for the Industry...and not only, and facing such abundance of information consuming our attention, we have to avoid the poverty of attention!

Dealing with Disruption in Travel and Hospitality, and in Airline Distribution

We see above that customers disrupt and businesses are disrupted, but customer-centric organizations disrupt too. We also see that organizations must disrupt their products and processes in order to enable the next customer experiences (CXs). Other lessons to learn came recently from *Deloitte's popular Patterns of Disruption series* which offers critical insight into the manifestations of disruption, and advises businesses to become laser-focused on five specific catalysts of change (the economy, enabling technology, platforms, consumer mindsets, and public policy), Deloitte offering at the beginning of this year a valuable "*2017 travel and*

hospitality industry outlook.” (Langford et al., 2017) Their research findings revealed that the travel landscape in 2016 has been reshaped by a combination of forces (being expected a similar climate in 2017), and invited leaders to accept the current frenetic pace of disruption, to remain vigilant, being responsive to change. We can easily observe that *Deloitte’s research findings correctly anticipated the evolutions mentioned above*, by revealing aspects such as: the link between the confident consumers the good perspective of hotels, airlines and online players; the impact of flooding the marketplace given to online private accommodation aggregators like Airbnb; the need of the online travel agencies (OTAs) to contribute to online travel planners’ best-in-class shopping and booking experiences; the need of travel brands to learn from non-travel brands and to meet new expectations with a differentiated experience, by infusing elements of on-demand, personalization (knowing that consumers are different travelers on different trips), and authenticity so as to provide the customer with a seamless shopping experience, ensuring brand’s conceptualization as a platform, seeking new avenues to scale, and making CX paramount.

On the other hand, another interesting aspect was underlined at the end of the last year by Maksim Izmaylov, Founder and CEO of Roomstorm (he also helped to start Travel Tech Con and Winding Tree), who show that *disruptors as Airbnb and Uber could be potentially replaced in the future by a blockchain company*. Izmaylov insisted to distinguish private blockchains (all the computers in the network being controlled by one organization; there is free access) and public blockchains (such as Bitcoin, Ethereum and Hyperledger). (Izmaylov, 2016) While in April 2017, Trond Vidar Bjørøy, Head of New Product Development and Implementation for Nordic markets at Travel Management firm ATPi, explained *“How Blockchain Could End Travel Industry Pain,”* from the viewpoint of: overbooking, fraud, identity and reputation, traveler profiles, settlement, loyalty, policy and compliance, duty of care, smart contracts, removing silos. (Bjørøy, 2017)

As we underlined from the very beginning, there is a clear evidence of the redefining of the modern marketing landscape by faster changing technologies and customer expectations, becoming essential to have a capability of testing fast new ideas, refining them, and bringing them rapidly to the relevant market. Making the marketing organization fit for the future presupposes to orchestrate the marketing ecosystem, to build marketing capabilities, and to apply agile ways of working at scale (agile operating model innovation and product development). (Buck et al., 2017) And in the last time we were witnessing the development of experiential offerings as differentiation strategy by optimizing experience for sizable groups of “connected” traveling customers, (Michelli, 2017) an increase in focusing on high priority CX initiatives involving big-data or technology interventions which improve traveler perceptions, (Michelli, 2017) the

development of algorithms which provides tailored travel recommendations by drawing data from users' social media, (Annicelli, 2017) or social media fights won by right managing online sentiments. (Dua, 2017)

What concerns the *prominence of disruption* (which requires creativity and money) in airline distribution, this was correctly revealed by the valuable study "*The Future of Airline Distribution, 2016 – 2021*" (International Air Transport Association/IATA 2016, Atmosphere Research Group), which recommended the incumbents to "Innovate and Disrupt" (taking into account that the greatest disruption will result from companies that aren't in airline distribution), and where it was underlined, among other aspects, that: the silos between Distribution (the target for each airline being to have the best possible "shelves" on which to sell its products) and other airline functions (particularly Marketing, Digital Commerce, and Sales) have been destroyed with the help of three disruptive factors (which affected airline distribution between 2012-2016: technology, ancillary products, and the embrace of retailing by smart carriers; the need of considering the fact that airline industry will be inspired and catalyzed by disruptive technology, social events, and commercial behavior outside this industry; the better retailing experiences that airline distribution professionals need to introduce will be based on: initiatives such as IATA's NDC and One Order, one hand, and constructs such as "the three I's", or by Full Retailing Platforms, on the other hand; true airline retailing is a real challenge, the interaction between the connected travelers and connected airlines (enabled by new strides in technology and distribution) being governed by new intuitive shopping experiences in relation with the traveler's discretionary purchases, and mobile viewed as being the channel, the travelers wanting more relevant offers and better service, and by 2021 the so-called "Active Distribution" (characterized by the link between the user experience and interface, and four passenger-centric factors: Connected consumer; Information clarity; Relevancy; Passenger-centric shopping processes) ensuring them more flexible flight shopping experiences and more personalized results. (Harteveldt, 2016)

Within this framework, it is interesting to also consider the following significant recent aspects:

- on November 15, 2016, reputed representatives of PwC's Strategy& (Strategy& was formed on March 31, 2014, when Booz & Company combined with PwC to create a new kind of consulting business) argued that airlines are challenged to adapt their distribution business model, showing the global trends reshaping travel distribution business models and threatening to weaken the connection between airlines and their customers, and identifying opportunities and pitfalls for airlines; they also underlined the airlines' need of enhancing internal capabilities and managing digital innovation very skilled, so as to improve direct

channel sales, marketing, cross-selling, and dynamic pricing and inventory management;” (Borgogna et al, 2016)

- on September 20, 2017 SAP News informed that *SAP Hybris Commerce, Travel Accelerator* (having significant recent enhancements), *received IATA NDC Level 3 Certification*, this certified solution including proper features as shown above (such as personalized offers, enabling airline companies to deliver a cohesive customer experience across digital and physical touch points) and enabling airlines to determine which products are offered to whom and at what price (based on: current activity, booking history, loyalty status and sales channel), in a central catalog being stored individually products, fares, flight ancillaries (like extra leg room and partner products);

- before the official beginning of the latest edition of the Digital Marketing Exposition & Conference, Cologne, Germany (“dmexco”), took place on September 11, 2017 “Lufthansa # FlyingLab: The dmexco”, a dmexco pre-conference held on board Flight LH 405 (for this group of visitors, dmexco 2017 already began in New York in the before mentioned Lufthansa FlyingLab, this exclusive conference high being broadcasted to all passengers via video live stream). There were discussed the most important trends and innovations in the sector (answering the passengers’ questions in the subsequent Q&A session), top speakers such as Cindy Chin and David Meza talking about NASA innovation, digital transformation, and new competitors, also speculating about *what could potentially be the next big thing in travel*;

- as highlighted by “Adweek”, the leading source of news for marketing, media, and advertising professionals, on the occasion of the above mentioned DMexco Conference in September 2017, Jon Suarez-Davis, Chief Strategy Officer at Salesforce Marketing Cloud expressed the opinion (in a interview with Adweek) that in order to be successful in providing modern and competitive sales, service and commerce, *companies’ transformation around structure and strategy still needs the oxygen of data flowing across departments via intelligent systems, seeing this as a work in progress*. (Cooper, 2017)

Instead of conclusions

Ten years ago, the reputed Services Marketing specialists Christopher H. Lovelock and Jochen Wirtz clearly showed: the need of implementing services marketing by managing relationships and building loyalty (knowing that the foundation for true loyalty lies in customer satisfaction, for which service quality is a key input), considering customer feedback and service recovery, improving service quality and productivity, and organizing for service leadership; the importance of understanding the challenge of building relationships with customers; that customers loyalty extends beyond behavior (including preference,

liking, future intentions etc.); how also important is to identify the reasons why customers defect and then take corrective action. (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007) Recently, in September 2017, we took the opportunity to analyze the latest approach of Jochen Wirtz on this topic (Wirtz, 2017).

Within this framework, we considered three issues (the wheel of loyalty, what drives customers to switch away from a service firm, and an integrated framework for CRM strategy), *looking then at identifying why CRM (Customer Relationship Management) is not still offering a big picture of what customers are really experiencing in the Era of Disruption and Digital Transformation, taking the case of the challenging and challenged under analysis industry.*

As we see above, the digital reality no. 1 is CX value. And trying to clarify our concerns, we find out that on the way of “toward a new CX” approach it was underlined that to create a better CX over the lifetime of the customer by engaging them and delivering value was always the promise of CRM. (Fish, 2017) We also find out that CX needs strong leadership, passionately driven to do what is right for the customer, understanding the importance of customers and colleagues, doing what is right for the organization. (Golding, 2014) On the other hand, Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) understand very well the significance of the opinion expressed by Geraldine Calpin, CMO, Hilton Worldwide (former Hilton’s global head of digital before becoming CMO in 2015) and made known by Adweek Staff on March 26, 2017: “...*the emergence of tech-savvy CMOs is really important - because we have tech-savvy customers.*”

And as in the last time we also approached significant related topics – such as: “*A holistic approach of revenue management and its relation to agile marketing. Tourist experience in a customer-driven era;*” (Purcarea, 2016) “*Looking at trends and designing a next-generation operating model putting CX reshaped by digital at the heart of it;*” (Purcarea, 2017) “*Marketing’s renaissance by committing to improve CX;*” (Purcarea, 2017) “*Strategic thinking, value creation, ecosystem revolution, growth strategies, CX value chain and CX policies*” (Purcarea, 2017) – **a question asked by a Siemens Financial Services specialist came to our mind: “When we see disruption or innovation, should we look to the disruptor or the incumbent? ... Those disruptors & innovators, they are literally the bane of the industry incumbent, not excluding the fact that these businesses throw things like age/gender/experience on their heads and “invert the triangle” almost without blinking – their rulebook is definitely not the same as it is for others. What these businesses do so well, is to look at the incumbents, scan them and pick out their weaknesses and then exploit them – not only in deliverables but in the approach, the manner and the way in which the go about creating the deliverable.”**¹

¹ Gajre, S. (2017). Disruption is happening... so what are you going to do? Oct 20, 2017, retrieved from: <http://customerthink.com/disruption-is-happening-so-what-are-you-going-to-do/>

So what are you going to do after the MLIBCW debate? In our opinion it would be better for companies to take the first step and act... by continuously learning and doing the best in providing just-in-time and relevant offerings for customers, delivering the right content at every touchpoint, uncovering the right insights (by mixing digital, social, big data and analytics), sharing real-time actionable data, embracing the mobile mind shift, better knowing brand purpose (considering customer service and support) and promise, better understanding the customer journeys and delivering a great CX, by building out a maturity model for CX... and the last but not the least looking at the incumbents.

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