

*The Influence of Real-Time Marketing on Social Media Users: A Study on Users of 'Ekşi Sözlük'**

Gerçek Zamanlı Pazarlamanın Sosyal Medya Kullanıcılarına Etkisi: Ekşi Sözlük Kullanıcıları Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research; is to explain the awareness about real-time marketing by social media users and its influence over them. Moreover, examining the change created by real-time marketing on shopping habits and brand loyalties of social media users has been aimed. The scope of this research; includes 200 users from "Ekşi Sözlük" which is among one of the most popular dictionaries in Turkey. As the research method; survey method has been used and survey forms were created via "Google Forms". Obtained data was coded and loaded to the SPSS for Windows 17.0 statistics packaged software. Then it was sorted out and analyzed by using this software. Importance of this research; real time marketing is acquirement of current affairs and production of new content in line with this information by brands. Users follow brands by means of social networks and they display the content which has been produced by brands. On the other part, brands shape the contents which they are going to create, by the help of the matters in question that the users bring up to the agenda at social networks and in this manner real-time marketing practices are put into process. From this standpoint, this research is significant in order to identify opinions and attitudes of social media users towards real-time marketing contents.

KEYWORDS

Social Media, Real-Time Marketing, Ekşi Sözlük

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ÖZ

Araştırmanın amacı; gerçek zamanlı pazarlamanın sosyal medya kullanıcıları tarafından bilinirliğini ve kullanıcılar üzerindeki etkisini açıklamaktır. Ayrıca, gerçek zamanlı pazarlamanın sosyal medya kullanıcılarının alış-veriş alışkanlıkları ve marka sadakatine yönelik meydana getirdiği değişimi incelemektir. Araştırmanın kapsamı; araştırma, Türkiye’de en popüler sözlükler arasında yer alan “Ekşi Sözlük” kullanan 200 kullanıcıyı kapsamaktadır. Araştırmanın yöntemi; araştırmada anket yöntemi kullanılmış olup anketler “Google Forms” aracılığıyla oluşturulmuştur. Elde edilen verileri Spss for Windows 17.0 istatistik paket programına kodlanarak yüklenmiştir. Daha sonra yine bu program aracılığıyla tasnif ve analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın önemi; gerçek zamanlı pazarlama, markaların gündeme dair gelişmeleri, bilgileri öğrenmesi ve bu bilgiler doğrultusunda içerik üretmesidir. Kullanıcılar, sosyal ağlar aracılığıyla markaları takip etmekte ve onların ürettiği içerikleri görüntülemektedir. Markalar ise sosyal ağlarda kullanıcılar tarafından gündeme taşınan konular sayesinde üretecekleri içerikleri şekillendirmekte ve böylece gerçek zamanlı pazarlama uygulamaları yapmaktadırlar. Bu açıdan yapılan araştırma; sosyal medya kullanıcılarının gerçek zamanlı pazarlama içeriklerine yönelik olan düşünce ve tutumlarını belirlemek açısından önemlidir.

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ANAHTAR KELİMELER

Sosyal Medya, Gerçek zamanlı Pazarlama, Ekşi Sözlük.

INTRODUCTION

Constant changes on customer profile and development of social media take shape interdependently and in this way new marketing techniques have emerged. Content marketing is a marketing method that brands build up to inform customers, attract customers' attention and influence them in a positive way by generating relevant content about the product or service which is aimed to be marketed. A great number of brands act as a Publisher and they share special contents via social networks. So as to be successful in content marketing, the produced content must be target-oriented, sentimental, shareable, authentic, and useable. Real-time marketing, a kind of content marketing, has a great impact on users. For brands, real-time marketing collects information about agenda and produces content relevant to that agenda. Nowadays, many brands are trying to use this new technique effectively.

1. SOCIAL MEDIA AND REAL TIME MARKETING

Web 2.0 applications which are described as a new technology and even assertively as a new age that provides personal users with opportunity to create content that they want and to share their personal ideas and viewpoints with others. (Jalali, 2009:198). Social media is the name of the whole communication instruments which use these applications. It is based on sharing, coalescing of participants on a shared point and usually enabling its users to obtain more information so as to make better choices (Evans, 2008:31). Social media is the content created by users via mobile and web-based technologies in order to share, discuss, and collaborate in a highly interactive environment (Kietzman et al.; 2011:242).

As is known, modern-day is information, communication, and technology age and developments in these areas and their influences constitute research subjects of related disciplines. When definitions about social media are analyzed, it is simply defined as developable and interactive online communication channels which contain and connect communities and provide the participation of target audience (Kalafatoğlu, 2010: 17).

Besides that, social media can be considered as developing online information sources and also platforms which are introduced, circulated, and used by consumers who are intended to educate each other about products, brands, services, people, and issues (Blackshaw and Nazarro, 2004: 2).

Different from other media platforms, at this platform, producers of content are not professionals, they are simply internet users. By using the internet and web-based technologies, social media transforms the monolog of media into bidirectional communication (Solis and Breakeyridge, 2009: 180).

In addition to these definitions, it is seen that social media is defined as online platforms where ideas, comments, and thoughts are shared by people who have common points of interest (Weber, 2009: 4) and as internet platforms where people get in contact with each other by means of text messages, pictures, videos, and audio files. "Communication" and "sharing" lie behind the concept in question (Hatipoğlu, 2009: 72).

Businesses have been keeping in step with the benefits and penetration of social media usage and they have begun to move their activities previously being conducted via web sites to social media. The traffic and density in the social media have allowed businesses to transform social media applications into a medium where they can advertise their products and services. Companies have started to share the latest news about their brands and products via social media (Yılmaz and Zengin, 2014:148).

Conventional advertisement and marketing activities involve offering some message contents which arouse interest of consumers. However, today, brands position consumers as a friend and by the help of warm relationships they invite consumers to their advertising activities thanks to the social media advertising, (Bóveda-Lambie and Hair, 2012: 215). Social media marketing and advertising are the substantially improved version of conventional word of mouth marketing which ensures consumers to interact with each other.

As marketing and advertising professionals cannot interfere in the dialogues among consumers and also the content created by consumers about the brand, several companies abstain from this new channel of marketing these days. On the other hand, the reasons such as being cheap, having global access capability, containing multimedia formats, including a wide range of platforms etc. render the usage of this new channel appealing. Social media is a channel that attracts consumers' attention, provides information to them, influences their ideas, attitudes and purchasing decisions, enables them to get in contact, and carry out evaluation after purchasing (Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 359).

Consumers who use social media platforms can express their views about the products and services that they use and can share their experiences with

each other. By courtesy of this interaction, these comments increase in number and become a whole of mass/common idea, like or wish.

The greatest advantages of brands which handle social media as a marketing and advertising channel is to detect consumer sensitivity by tracking social media platforms and to have fan pages on these platforms. Via these pages, companies can meet consumers directly, exhibit their products, and fulfill the expectations of consumers online (Kara, 2012: 106). Moreover, by using social media marketing, brands can bring the features that their competitors do not have into the forefront and boost their brand awareness. Brands manage their reputation by putting positive aspects of their brands to the forefront and enabling the interaction between these positive aspects and consumers. Furthermore, they can influence potential customers more by aiming social media groups and platforms that the target audience uses most. Especially, aiming at opinion leaders promotes sales (Brown, 2008: 63). In this channel where having interaction with consumers is enabled, preparing content in accordance with agenda has created a new approach: "Real Time Marketing".

1.1. Real Time Marketing

Despite the fact that Real Time Marketing has been used since 1990s, it is an important tool for the digital strategies of many brands today. Brands have been trying to win customers' favor and create a difference by following current events and organizing real-time marketing campaigns. For brands, real time marketing means following current news and events and reaching to target audience by means of content, advertisement, and product placement which are in direct proportion to current events. Social media which is the most important channel for real time marketing is quite effective to reach target audience.

At real time marketing which is based on seizing the moment and creating reflex, it is important to follow agenda and customer movements and concomitantly create impressive contents. Under the conditions that these contents are prepared quickly and smartly, they enable brands to enhance their own brand awareness largely (Kural, 2014). When it is considered that creating awareness provided a significant competitive advantage, the importance of real time marketing is understood clearly.

Additionally, real time marketing is a marketing tactic that a brand elicits direct communication with its target audience by means of active participation to dialogues at platforms where target audience frequently use. Distinctive feature of this marketing tactic is to convey a product or a service to the right

person exactly in the time of need when attention occurs. On the contrary to others, this tactic races against minutes, even seconds. For this reason, companies instantly develop content and if necessary, they update their services depending upon the feedback from their customers and target audience (Kural, 2014). Therefore, brands and companies can immediately interact with their target audience and by this means, can increase their trustworthiness.

Even though correct usage of this channel provides advantage, misuse of it may cause irrevocable and permanent damage. In this respect, the points that businesses and brands should take into consideration at real time marketing practices are as follows (Taş, 2014):

*Real time marketing is not a strategy, it is a tactic. In order to apply this tactic, it is not necessary to alter marketing strategy completely. In that, this marketing tactic may offer some advantages to the brand, but it should not give rise to a strategy change entirely.

*Beyond social media, content marketing is important. Today, as we see the influence of digital world in all areas, noticeable changes take place in the sector. These changes are related to content mostly. As content is closely related to tactic and strategy, a holistic approach is needed for this issue.

* Content leads to transformation. This is sayable for contents which are mindful of social behaviors. This is because marketers use contents as a transformation unit which ensures augmentation for brand recognition. Moreover, by the help of recognition, potential customers increase in number. Recognition brings along branding and this change matters to transform potential customers into real ones.

* Social media, search results, and contents directly affect the things that we see and share with other people. Visibility takes place in results as the most compatible content with the keywords entered to the search engine, as to high level access is closely related to the sharing of this content.

Consumer has the potential to choose the product in person instead of the product offered to him/her preparedly. In turn, brands are eager to be the chosen brand. In the past, brands had the mindset that “the more interaction, the more consumer perception”. Now, brands want to create more consumer perception by providing more up-to-date interaction and more impressive content.

Furthermore, brands which are shaping their real time marketing dialogues according to four key elements make difference substantially. These

elements are seizing the moment, creating current reflex, observing customer movements, and producing effective content. Effectiveness of the content has a critical importance to present brand recognition and difference (Güler, 2015).

It should not be forgotten that real time marketing is a technology as well as a marketing tool. While the individuals are surfing on the net, companies gather information about their search terms, sex and age information, shopping history, titles and headlines that they show interest. When this information is brought together, it is possible to form advertisements which are suitable for the interests and preferences of the consumers.

Consumer data may be composed of many different data such as e-mails, blog posts, site visits, searches, and instant messaging data. All these information assist companies to estimate consumers' interest areas and preferences. By these means, companies can generate instant marketing messages relevant to consumers' preferences. In addition, real time marketing messages may lead consumers to devote extra time or spend extra money at the related company.

At the same time, companies may also use real time marketing to estimate how consumers carry out purchasing process. Customers may not enjoy several-step purchasing processes; instead, they may enjoy instant purchasing processes. Via real time information about customers, companies may also introduce special offers or discounts (Karaman, 2014).

2. SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION OF BRANDS AND CONTENT MARKETING

A range of influential features such as low cost, rapid diffusion and currency of information, a medium where sincerity is essential, opportunity to recognize target audience, assessment and evaluation opportunity, providing intimacy between individuals by offering agentless direct communication are effective on the utilization of social media by brands.

Because of the detrimental effects of global stagnation, brands have devised crisis strategies and they have set on finding new tactics to struggle with them. While searching for new tactics, studying and understanding the fluctuant attitudes and behaviors of consumers become a crucial issue for companies during and after economic crisis. Recently, one of the spectacular tools that have been used by companies to achieve their goals is social media in its entirety. In the beginning, social media was for fun, but owing to its

remarkable advantages it has become a marketing phenomenon later on (Kirtiř and Karahan, 2011: 260) and content preparation for this phenomenon has also come into prominence. For businesses, establishment of separate departments for social media within the organizational structures and following the current events outside may be deemed to be the indicators of the emphasis on real time marketing and content preparation for social media.

Marketing concept of the new age is getting rid of conventional understanding and is exerting distinctive, creative, and innovative moves for brands and is using digital channels as an important tool. This approach can be seen as an evaluation from conventional to digital.

In the context of Digital Marketing and Social Media Marketing, from the viewpoint of a brand, keeping the pace of the evolution is closely related to the prepared content. Content should be designed and produced by taking account of customer, digital channels, and their dynamics and it should be strategically distributed considering timeliness.

Briefly, brands use content marketing as a tool to make contribution to the life of the customers. Content marketing adds value to the brand. Rebecca Lieb, the author of *Advertising Age*, states that content marketing is not a push strategy; conversely a pull strategy which does not have irritative content on the contrary it has impressive content. In other words, rather than conventional marketing methods which disrupt users to reach them, content marketing arouses interest and appeals them (řanlıdilek, 2015).

Technologically at this point, it is very easy and advantageous to follow momentary developments, produce momentary content, generate relevant content, and make additional movement according to feedback. In the competitive environment, taking a step forward and developing a different marketing strategy are two examples of the requirements which should be taken into consideration by brands (Güldař, 2014).

At an ever-increasing competitive environment where service qualities are very close to each other, establishing a connection with customers becomes not a luxury, but a necessity for brands. Brands which understand their customers, help them, and contribute to their life always have better chance to survive and advance. One of the effective ways to establish that connection is to reach out the customers via content. Content is not advertisements which are going to be published as a result of a creative work; it is the information that explains the benefits of the relationship with brand to the customer. In other

words, all kinds of publications which can attract attention of target audience will increase connection establishment probability of target audience with brand. Therefore, brand-customer relationship becomes a mutual relationship instead of a unilateral one (Şanlıdilek, 2015).

If the brand has a long-term content marketing plan and strategy, the produced content will inevitably reflect on prestige, traffic, lead (membership, subscription etc.) , and eventually sales figures.

After social media has integrated into everyone's life so deeply, a unique channel has aroused for brands to tell their story. Content sharing and dialogues about brands are two of the most significant points for brands in social media. A strong content will always make people speak, which is also suitable for sharing. People use social media for sharing and if a brand has a strong content to share, a user who shares that content shares not only the content but also the brand of it. If a content creates a desire to share, it is a great content. Just because of this reason, users will automatically share that brand and undertake the distribution duty of the content (Şanlıdilek, 2015).

Indeed, choosing the right title and image to draw attention; creating an available, consumable, and shareable content; empathy establishment necessity of the content; developing online identity of the consumer via shared content are side elements of the content and they complete benefit-entertainment-inspiration triangle (Apaydın, 2015). There are a few significant points that make content marketing strong. The most significant point is the ability of content to create a feeling at the addressee. This feeling can be created by means of various elements such as make him laugh or surprise or draw his attention to an unknown point which is attractive for him. The most significant point that should be avoided at content marketing is to pursue sales goal. A sale oriented work will throw content marketing off the track. Another significant point is always to take the end user into consideration (Şanlıdilek, 2015). Content should attract the attention of the user first. Besides, if the content arouses desire to comment or share at the user who wants to add something from himself, this means that content marketing has attained its goal.

3. INFLUENCE OF REAL TIME MARKETING OVER SOCIAL MEDIA USERS: A RESEARCH ON EKŞİ SÖZLÜK USERS

3.1. Research Objective

Users follow brands via social networks and view the content produced by them. On the other side, brands shape contents which they are going to produce on the basis of the issues brought up to the agenda by users and by this way they perform real time marketing practices. In this context, the aim of this research is to inspect recognition of real time marketing by users, explain its influence over them, and examine the transformation of users' shopping habits and brand loyalties which are caused by real time marketing.

3.2. Research Scope And Method

This research has been conducted on 200 Ekşi Sözlük users between the dates 03.06.2015–13.07.2015. In the research, survey method has been used and this survey was generated by using “Google Forms”. Obtained data has been coded and then loaded to SPSS for Windows 17.0 statistics packaged software. Then, it has been classified and analyzed by means of this software again.

In the research which has been designed to be descriptive type, data has been collected via a survey developed by utilizing the literature. In the survey, right along with demographic questions, there are also questions to determine social media usage frequency of Ekşi Sözlük users, to learn their opinions about social media accounts of brands, to measure their knowledge levels about real time marketing, and also to define the influence of real time marketing over shopping habits.

3.3. Findings

3.3.1. Distribution of Participants in Respect to Demographic Characteristics

Age ranges of Ekşi Sözlük users who have attended to the research are as follows: 29% of them are between 18-24, 52% of them are between 24-30 and 19% of them are between 30-45. None of the participants aged 45 and older. It is seen that participants are between the age range 24-30 intensely. Additionally, 9% of participants have a high school degree, 63% of them have a graduate degree, and 28% of them have a post graduate and doctorate degree. None of the participants has a primary education degree. Here, the attention grabbing point is most of the participants have university education.

3.3.2. Distribution of Participants In Respect Of Social Media Usage Frequency

81 percent of the participants in the research have stated that they were using social media actively and conversely 19 percent of them have stated that

they did not use it actively. Real time marketing is a marketing technique which is realized via social media and this technique can only create an effective process providing that users utilize social media actively. It can be said that there is a linear relationship between active usage of social media and influence of real time marketing. Yet, the more frequent usage of social media gets, the more influential the messages are.

3.3.3. Distribution of Participants in Respect to Following Frequency of Social Media Accounts

Forty five percent of the participants have remarked that they were following social media accounts of various brands. Remaining fifty five percent-block does not follow any of the social media accounts of brands. In this respect, this 55%-block which do not follow social media accounts of brands cause a disadvantageous situation from the viewpoint of the impression that will probably be created by real time marketing.

After all, it is not a correct approach to say that not following social media accounts of brands verifies the ineffectiveness and inadequacy of real time marketing technique. Brands usually serve real time marketing contents to users on Twitter. Due to the features such as “Retweet” and “Discover” and sponsor advertisements on Twitter, it is possible to convey real time marketing contents of brands to users who do not follow accounts of these brands.

3.3.4. Distribution of Participants in Respect to the Aim to Follow Social Media Accounts of Brands

It has been seen that 73% of the participants follow social media accounts of brands in order to be informed about special offers and discounts, 25% of them follow to report their complaints and suggestions and 2% of them follow to support the related brand. A great portion of the participants, seventy three percent of them, follow brands so as to be informed about special offers and discounts. Under these circumstances, it can be said that follows which are aimed to track special offers and discounts ensure that real time marketing contents reach to more users.

3.3.5. Distribution of Participants in Respect to the Influence of Social Media Advertising over Their Shopping Habits

16% of the participants have pointed out that advertisements on social media have an influence over their shopping habits, 38% of them have stated that advertisements on social media did not have an influence over their

shopping habits, and finally 46% of them have said that advertisements on social media occasionally have an influence over their shopping habits. 46% of the participants who have stated that social media advertising occasionally influenced their shopping habits reveal to what extent the quality of the produced content is important.

Nowadays, changing sense of marketing leads to the disappearance of the influence of conventional sense of marketing over customers. Contents which are produced by means of conventional marketing techniques are conveyed directly without benefiting from the opportunities offered by social media. As a consequence, target audience does not show interest to the content. Concordantly, importance of new and interesting marketing techniques such as real time marketing comes to light.

3.3.6. Distribution of Participants in Respect to the Influence of Communication with Brands over Attitudes

According to the research, 71% of the participants have expressed that communication of a brand with them and their responding affected their attitude towards that brand positively. On the other side, 20% of them have expressed that their attitude did not change regarding to the communication of brand and 9% of them are irresolute about this question. It is understood that social media was an important tool to connect brands and customers. In social media, besides creating a positive dialogue in good spirits, responding to complaints and suggestions of users also influences the attitudes of the users positively.

3.3.7. Distribution of Participants in Respect to Having Knowledge about Real Time Marketing Tactics

59% of the participants are informed of real time marketing tactics but 41% of them are not. Juxtaposition of these percentages may originate from the fact that real time marketing is a newly-emerging technique. Today, almost everyone has knowledge of conventional marketing techniques which are carried out via mass media. However, real time marketing is a newly-emerging technique which has been developing on account of the integration of social media into society.

3.3.8. Distribution of Participants in Respect to Their Interest to the Content Produced by Brands Concerning the Agenda

It has been seen that content produced by brands concerning the agenda had attracted the attention of 60% of the participants but it had not attracted the

attention of 26% of them. 14% of them are irresolute about interest. As it is understood, users show interest to real time marketing contents. Brands have been taking advantage of the influence of social media over customer and they produce real time marketing content and achieve their goal substantially.

3.3.9. Distribution of Participants in Respect to Influence of Content over Participants' Attitudes Produced by Brands Concerning the Agenda

It has been understood that content produced by brands concerning the agenda had positively influenced the attitudes of 59% of the participants. However, these contents do not lead to change at the attitudes of 41% of the participants. Contents concerning the agenda highly influence attitudes of users towards the brand. User whose attention is drawn by real time marketing contents will have a positive attitude towards brands which produce those contents.

CONCLUSION

Today, customer profile changes constantly and conventional marketing techniques are not able to influence it. As a consequence of that, it is necessary to develop new techniques in marketing area. Development of the social media, shifts shopping habit of people right along with other habits. Before purchasing a product or service, people investigate comments of other people who previously experienced that product or service and then after using a product or service, they share their comments via social networks. As it is understood, target audience has been playing an active role from design of a product through its release to the market.

At this research, it is inferred that 45% of the participants who were using social media actively follow social media accounts of brands. This situation lays emphasis on the importance of social media at conveying real time marketing content to the users. Moreover, 73% of users who follow social media accounts of brands aim to keep informed of discounts and special offers. In line with this purpose, from the viewpoint of brands, while producing real time marketing contents it is necessary to give the impression of providing new opportunity to users.

The fact that users who have been following social media accounts of brands are "occasionally" influenced of advertisements that they run across, reveals the importance of produced content quality. Appealing contents which

grab users' attention are an important factor at the success of social media marketing.

Yet another result obtained from the research is that 71% of the participants are positively influenced by the communication of brands with themselves. This percentage is very high and it puts forward that being in interaction with users is highly effective for brands while providing contents related with social media marketing.

A considerable proportion of users think that produced contents which are concerning the agenda are interesting. According to this result, it can be conferred that real time marketing techniques had attained their aim. Based on this, brands which seek awareness should give precedence to real time marketing contents.

Furthermore, 59% of the users have expressed that content concerning the agenda lead them to tend towards related brand. This result proves the importance of real time marketing from the point of brands. Brands which intend to draw attention, build brand equity, and create brand awareness are required to benefit from social media tools and real time marketing which are evolving continuously.

From the research, it is understood that, by means of social media, real time marketing breathes a new life into marketing and real time marketing is of capital importance while influencing new customer profile who feels the pulse of agenda via social media. Brands which are adaptable to current time and share the agenda with user become distinct from "asocial" brands which do not take part in social media actively and do not produce real time marketing contents and these "social" brands cover a significant distance in terms of brand value and brand awareness.

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