Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers: Implications for international marketing strategy

Pierre R. Berthon [a], Leyland F. Pitt [b,*], Kirk Plangger [b], Daniel Shapiro [b]

[a] McCallum Graduate School of Business, Bentley University, 175 Forest Street, Waltham, MA 02452, U.S.A.
[b] Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University, 500 Granville Street, Vancouver V6C 1W6, Canada

Abstract The 21st century has brought both opportunities and challenges in our global, boundaryless world. Importantly, managers face a dynamic and interconnected international environment. As such, 21st century managers need to consider the many opportunities and threats that Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers present and the resulting respective shifts in loci of activity, power, and value. To help managers understand this new dispensation, we propose five axioms: (1) social media are always a function of the technology, culture, and government of a particular country or context; (2) local events rarely remain local; (3) global events are likely to be (re)interpreted locally; (4) creative consumers' actions and creations are also dependent on technology, culture, and government; and (5) technology is historically dependent. At the heart of these axioms is the managerial recommendation to continually stay up to date on technology, customers, and social media. To implement this managerial recommendation, marketers must truly engage customers, embrace technology, limit the power of bureaucracy, train and invest in their employees, and inform senior management about the opportunities of social media.
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1. Our constantly changing world

Remember the heady days of Web 1.0? In one technological tsunami, consumers worldwide were able to interact with firms and each other on the multimedia platform that became known as the World Wide Web. The great majority of early company websites were little more than what came to be termed 'brochureware,' as organizations rushed to have an Internet presence by converting their corporate brochures to simple websites. Yet, this online presentation evolved rapidly to online coordination and commerce, with content spanning from entertainment to education. Companies saw the Web as the new Eldorado and quickly colonized the space.

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail addresses: pberthon@bentley.edu (P.R. Berthon),
lpitt@sfu.ca (L.F. Pitt), kirk_plangger@sfu.ca (K. Plangger),
dshapiro@sfu.ca (D. Shapiro).

Figure 1.   Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers
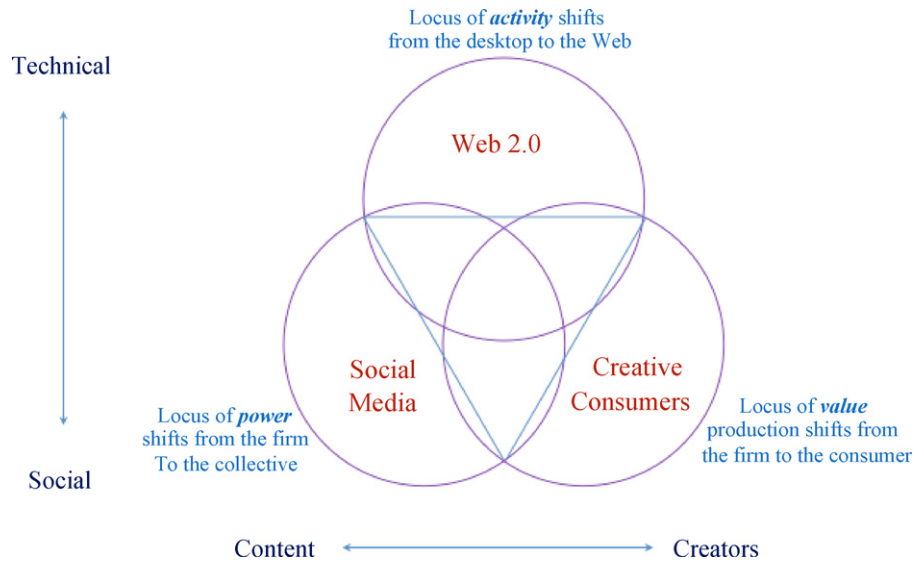
However, the world changed yet again! Just as organizations began to feel that they understood and had taken control of the Internet, along came a wave of new technologies that changed cultural norms and innovative praxes that effectively rendered many managers confused and helpless. This is particularly true for marketing executives charged with formulating and implementing marketing strategies internationally—in a world where consumer time zones have become invisible and communication immediate.

In this article, we provide a brief overview of Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers, and explore the challenges and opportunities that these phenomena present to managers generally and to international marketers and their strategies in particular. We also show that these phenomena have specific and unique implications for international marketing strategy, and we provide five axioms to aid international marketers in exploiting the upside of these phenomena while limiting the considerable downside that can occur far too easily.

2. Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers

The terms *Web 2.0*, *social media*, and *creative consumers* are often used imprecisely and interchangeably—largely because they are closely related and are, indeed, interdependent. However, they are conceptually discrete, and marketing managers need to understand the nuances of each to better serve the worldwide marketplace. One way of thinking about the differences between Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers is illustrated

in Figure 1, which uses two delineating dimensions of focus.

As seen in Figure 1, Web 2.0 can be thought of as the technical infrastructure that enables the social phenomenon of collective media and facilitates consumer-generated content. The latter are distinguished by the difference in focus: social media can be thought of as focusing on content, and consumer generation on the creators of that content. Simply, Web 2.0 enables the creation and distribution of the content that is social media.

2.1. Web 2.0

Web 2.0 technologies have caused three effects: (1) a shift in locus of activity from the desktop to the Web, (2) a shift in locus of value production from the firm to the consumer, and (3) a shift in the locus of power away from the firm to the consumer. Indeed, Web 2.0 can be thought of as a series of technological innovations in terms of both hardware and software that facilitate inexpensive content creation, interaction, and interoperability, and that put the lay user—rather than the firm—center stage in terms of design, collaboration, and community on the World Wide Web. Contrasting Web 2.0 with Web 1.0 can be thought of in terms of technology that has enabled a shift in focus from companies to consumers, individuals to communities, nodes to networks, publishing to participation, and intrusion to invitation. While Web 2.0 is technological, its effects are sociological and little short of revolutionary in their implications for business.

The origin of the term *Web 2.0* is credited to the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference of 2004, during which O'Reilly described the Web 2.0 phenomenon