CHAPTER 8

DIGITAL PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has witnessed the emergence of digital society in various parts of the world as a consequence of the increasing use of new communication and information technologies which have brought profound socio-economic changes into our lives. With the advent of computer technology, it has become possible to digitize almost everything. Change has always been a characteristic of human evolution but the speed at which these transformations have taken place has been unprecedented. Needless to say, various forms of traditional media have significantly been influenced by advanced innovations and it can easily be foreseen that this change will continue into the future. Throughout all these changes, perception management has had to be exercised in a more rigorous way. This study aims to provide an introduction to the topic of change and transformation in perception management in the light of digitalization, a topic which has already attracted much attention from scholars and researchers, particularly in the last decade.

Keywords: Perception, digitalisation, perception management

1. The Concept of Perception and Perception Management

First we should provide a clear definition of perception. In general terms, perception is the way we notice or recognize things using our senses of sight, smell, hearing, and touch According to a more elaborate definition, perception is the "awareness of the elements of the environment through physical sensation" which indicates "a mental process, such as seeing, hearing, or smelling, resulting from the immediate external stimulation of a sense organ" (Collins Online Dictionary, 2021). Although we perceive the world around us with ease and enthusiasm, we do not directly know how this happens. It can often be difficult to think that any perception mechanism exists; most individuals are simply 'given' perceptions as obviously true facts about the world.

It is clear that the sensibility of all images has fallen fit to the demands of their being outlived and reproducing, and there are a number of ways in which senses have evolved. In this sense, the contact of human beings with the outer world occurs as a result of perception. According to Wade (2005), perception is not only the most effective mental activity, but also a completely remarkable one. Rather than supplying us with objective impressions of our surroundings, the function of perception is to provide an effective plan.

In evolutionary terms the function of perception is to enable us to interact with the objects in the world surrounding us. Perceptions guide behaviour. Vision is used to determine the location of objects with respect to the perceiver, so that they can be approached, grasped, cast aside, or avoided as appropriate for survival (Wade, 2005, p. 3).

As stated by Borghi (2005), fifty years of studies in cognitive technological know-how have demonstrated that the observation of cognition is essential for a systematic knowledge of human behaviour. A developing wide variety of researchers in the discipline are demonstrating that mental strategies together with remembering, questioning, and information language are primarily based on the bodily interactions that humans have with their environment. It should also be noted that cognitive systems arise from perception and movement. It is extremely vital for the embodied framework to demonstrate that cognition is grounded in bodily interactions with the environment. The manner in which human beings constitute and recognize the world round them is directly related to perception and action. Regarding the recent data, Borghi (2005) also emphasizes that even though "a direct non-semantic route to action might exist; interactions between perception, action, and knowledge are very limited and profound" (p. 22), thus they should be taken into consideration.

Perception management signifies the domination of knowledge acquisition from the external world to boost the obtained perceptions. Agarwal (2009) defines perception as "a process by which individuals select, organize and interpret their sensory impressions so as to give meaning to their environment" (p. 1). As a sophisticated process, perception differs from one person to another. It should be emphasized that behavioural patterns of individuals are far more affected by their perception of reality than actual reality. A comparison between sensation and perception indicates that while sensation entails merely the reception of stimuli by means of sensory organs, perception encompasses the reception of unprocessed data from the senses and makes it pass through a cognition process that consists of filtration, modification and transformation phases. It is clear that individuals are constantly exposed to abundant stimuli; however, they only single out of some of them. "Learning, motivation and personality" are the main the factors that influence the tendencies in this selection process. Likewise, some external factors, such as intensity, size, contrast, repetition, motivation, novelty and familiarity" (Agarwal, 2009, pp. 1–2) also play a significant role in the selection process.

As a significant aspect of part of modern information warfare, perception management is a propaganda technique that is intended to modify the perceptions of a target audience. Having originated in the U.S. Military as part of their PSYOPS (Psychological Operations) program, this term began to describe how selective information is provided to a target audience to influence their emotions, incentive and unprejudiced reasoning for the purpose of creating a change in behaviour that is favourable to the sponsor (Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 2012). Likewise, perception management is specified by the U.S. Department of Defence, as a process which "combines truth projection, operations security, cover and deception, and psychological operations" (as cited in Brunner, 2013, p. 2).

Kenneth Eade (2016), the best-selling author of the Brent Marks Legal Thriller Series, quotes the definition of perception management by the United States Department of Defence as the "actions to convey and/or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning as well as to intelligence systems and leaders at all to influence official estimates, ultimately resulting in foreign behaviours and official actions favourable to the originator's objectives." In various ways, perception management combines truth projection, operations, security, cover and deception and psychological operations.

At this point, a vital distinction between Perception Management and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) should be highlighted. While psychological operations indicate the

implementation of various means of communication to "demoralize an enemy and encourage surrender" (p. 4), perception management incorporates psychological operation alongside "truth projection, operations security, cover and deception" to form it into a lot of extensive and across-the-board informational thought (Agarwal, 2009, p. 4).

The closest definition of Perception Management in the business sector has been provided by Chris Komisarjevsky, CEO of Burson Marsteller, as "a methodology which helps us while we work with our clients to go through a very systematic thoughtful process in order to be able to help our clients identify what resources they have, what their barriers for being successful are , and how we can use communications tools (internet, social media, TV etc.) to help them accomplish their objectives" (Osmani, 2019).

Initially the military, then the business world including marketing, brand management, advertising, and risk management followed by governance and politics along with leadership, psychology, journalism and even sports are the main areas where perception management is extensively practised.

Johansson and Ning Xiong (2003) convey that perception management can include the following:

- reasoning about information requests with respect to the underlying mission and situation;

- ranking the importance of various information requests and resolving the conflicts between them;

- real-time distribution and adaptation of perception tasks through, e.g., cooperation or negotiation among decision agents;

- management of other data acquisition resources, in addition to sensor devices, that can also support the perception process (e.g., in a command and control system, additional resources may include human observers or news agencies);

- planning of sensor external actions (e.g., controlling the motion of a mobile platform carrying sensors) to support the purpose of perception with increased scope and utility of gained information;

- pro-active deployment and planning of resources according to predicted situation tendency, to get first-time information of an event which is likely to happen in the upcoming period (p. 3).

The increasing volume and detail of information captured by organizations using the likes of multimedia, social media, and the Internet are much likely to influence future job prospects as well as how the public perceives those organizations.

In the business world, perception management is the act that helps to put brands in positions that make them have advantages over their competitors. Perception management in business is all about convincing people to be customers and remain loyal customers. Marketers and branding experts frequently indulge in perception management, which allows them to create a positive climate for what they intend to sell. One of the greatest influencers of perception management is digitalization – digitization has made perception management highly effective and efficient. Undoubtedly, perception management and information warfare are very common in the present Digital Age. It is very common to the extent that it has become quite elusive to differentiate between facts and myths, as well as images and reality. This is where business leaders and astute marketers can come in and make sure that rational substance goes with story, and plausible narrative goes with branding. These leaders can deliver on the promise and make sure that reality correlates with the image, in order to elongate term value, sustainable organizations, and sustainable marketing campaigns. Goldstone, Feng, and Rogosky (2005) discuss that perception management has in time become a fancy phrase for assisting brands to gain advantage over their competitors. The time period traces its starting place to the US military, however, and it has since spread through commercial enterprise circles. Perception Management is now offered as a career via PR firms. Emphasizing the necessity of asking questions and getting answers from others in perception management Otara (2011) states that most leaders commonly do not acquire feedback very regularly and, in many instances, where it is given it is not in the most constructive manner. But, constructive remarks provide information that helps individuals recognise how they are doing.

According to Goldman (2004), deception and disinformation are important components of perception management in order to make the target audience or groups believe whatever any authority wants them to believe notwithstanding the truth or validity of the information being promoted. Perception management operations have become a mainstream part of information management procedures in a variety of modern organizations. The operations pertaining to perception management have been an integral part of information management procedures in several modern organizations. Goldman (2004) discusses that perception management can be executed both as part of a wider international public diplomacy initiative between governments and it can function as a means of public affairs communications between a

government and its citizens. Many public relations firms provide perception management services to business clients by assisting them to shape the perceptions of stakeholders.

Waldbuesser and Komlósi (2015) put forth that the younger generations receive a lot of attention, enjoy a lot of freedom and thus could have the simplest possibilities of building their social networks through which they manage to strengthen their relations. The dwindling impact of regional/local ties on all examined generations by Waldbuesser and Komlósi may point toward the emergence of a new, technology-extensive tradition of interconnection and readiness to work freely in this network of connected entities. One should perceive and involve all members of the new digitalized data surroundings in a radically different manner than before.

Sanders (2014) asserts that state agencies all over the world have an extended-settled interest in belief superintendence. We can see that this falls unevenly into four categories: prizing the constancy from a suspect during interrogations, wiping memory or putting memories into the sub-consciousness so they cannot be retrieved without the fit techniques, the consummate physical and subjective check of a substance, and counteracting the perceptions of the common movement, publicizing and the shaping of events. Furthermore, Sanders assets that the mind control of individuals has been of particular interest to the U.K. and U.S. governments since as early as 1947 and in all likeness, much earlier than that. There are several valid techniques that have been used since the 1940s, consisting of the administration of drugs, pain, hypnotism and psychotropic machinery. One should only look at the inquiry methods practised in prisons across the world to realise that these techniques are still being used.

> "…both the U.K. and U.S. governments knowingly employed unethical and illegal testing methods on unwitting civilians, in order to achieve their ends. This monstrous and wide-ranging human experimentation was often carried out by the very cream of the medical and psychological profession. The testimonies of various survivors of the whims of these 'professionals' gives support to the documented evidence" (Sanders, 2014, p. 215).

It can easily be seen that Sanders highlights many deviations, not to say abnormalities, related to the mind manipulation phenomena and the way it has impacted societies. For example, some experimental packages might also very well be related to different issues and tragedies which have been plaguing our world. Knowledge management entails human expertise, which is now and again known as 'tacit expertise'. It is quite clear that in the digital environment, since records can be easily copied and re-processed, the internet can, in spite of everything, be regarded as the world's largest photocopying gadget. What becomes valuable is what cannot be copied (Quinn, 2002, p. 18).

2. The Concept of Digital Perception Management

The increase in the number of computer devices and Internet users has a positive impact on perception management. Incontestably, the Internet is one of the best places to change the perception of a person, and it has been widely used to change the perception of both consumers and prospective consumers. Consumers are the final link in the chain of every business. They are the ones that purchase your product or service, talk about it, and may even recommend it to other people. Perception management involves managing and tweaking what consumers think about a brand, and digitalization has made it easier and more effective. Customers of every brand are regularly online, and they are connected to each other and also connected to you. Fortunately for brand consumers, the Internet is designed in such a way that anyone can say anything at any time he/she wishes to, making it possible for them to state their positive or negative opinions about a brand. Fortunately for brands, too, the Internet does not prevent them from viewing these opinions. This is exactly where perception management comes in. These opinions are taken, presented by the brand to its team, and used to create value. With digitalization, it has been made easy for brands and individuals to know the perception of people, and then work on changing it favourably. As the outline of the dawning digital date has taken shape, a heavy totality of personal data is incessantly being handled, recombined, interchanged and often stored for unsettled periods of time (Camenisch, Leenes, Hansen & Schallaböck, 2011). At this point, it might be convenient to point out content management. Mauthe and Thomas (2004) express that content management functions as a cornerstone for many operations in the media industry. However, since such systems extend all kinds of media and custom cases, there is an excess of dissimilar solutions that all pigeonhole Content Management Systems (CMS).

Furthermore, the exchangeability of telephoning, fax, video and e-mail along with the convergence of the internet, digital television, and diverse Wi-Fi communication devices will enable conversation technologies to become a network of networks to be able to transform the ways of doing business. Not only have management topics including digital disruption, techniques for using digital transformation, digital convergence, leveraging social media to enhance digital product fulfillment, and developing cost via digital products emerged, but also various means of media consisting of all styles of software programs, e-book publishers, movies, video games, magazines, newspapers, music have all been dramatically affected with the advent of digital technologies and this change sees likely to continue in the future as well.

Describing the concept of digital convergence and displaying the opportunities it provides for digital product companies, Strader (2011) emphasizes that digital convergence provides possibilities and incentives for digital product corporations to undertake an extensive range of horizontal integration techniques, cross-industry techniques, intermediary strategies, and tactical stage mass customization and interactivity strategies. Nevertheless, once a route is selected it is very often duplicated via competition. In fact, digital convergence offers opportunities and the inducement for digital product agencies to undertake an extensive range of horizontal integration techniques, move-industry techniques, intermediary strategies, and tactical stage mass customization and interactivity strategies, but as soon as a course is selected it is regularly duplicated via competitors (Strader, 2011, p. 137).

Digital convergence furnishes opportunities and the motivation for digital result assembly to adopt a distant rove of level integration strategies, trial-labour strategies, intermediary strategies, and tactical mass customization and interactivity strategies. Doug Tedder (2016) summarises the characteristics, the results and the future of digital transformation as:

- A hyper-focus on the customer experience

- Operational processes are well–defined, streamlined, and transparent.

- Clear integration between data and process.

- Think "value" not "activities".

Likewise, the results of digital transformation are:

- Ability to collaborate in real-time among application engineers to co-design and co-create solutions

- Ability to have engineers engage directly with customers

- Strong knowledge capital and knowledge work flow

- Growth in sales that touch digital things

- Software, media, or sales through Internet channels have gone up by orders of magnitude

- Traffic and Internet audience more than doubled

Finally, for the future of digital transformation, the following predictions are made:

- Digital transformation will become the key strategic thrust for most CEOs

- Digital transformation initiatives will be consolidated into a single vision and function

- Digital transformation will require new skills and a shift in IT investments

- Big data analytics will serve as the foundation for digital transformation

- The Internet of Things (IoT) will be a catalyst for the expansion of digital transformation to all corners of the economy

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) will drive new digital transformation revenue streams.

As far as the impacts of information systems are concerned, McLean and Wetherbe (2006) assert that these systems soften individuals in changeable ways. What is a profit to one individual may be a malediction to another. This section discusses some of the ways that IT may affect individuals, their perceptions, and their behaviours. For instance, in the 1970s, researchers forebode that information processing system-supported message systems would reduce managerial will in determination fabrication and thus create disgruntled managers. This discontent may be the spring of intuit dehumanization.

In this context, O'Sullivan (2018) claims that public perception in the internet era can be ephemeral. No matter what experts may deliberate, gossip mills can readily distribute misinformation or downright deception. In this context, O'Sullivan puts forth the lessons for maintaining trust as follows:

- Don't lie! Institutional credibility is gold and difficult to recoup when lost; it's better to say you don't know but are taking steps to find the answer.

- Government and private-sector secrecy, poor messaging, poor infection control, and a lack of preparedness increases the potential for fear and panic, among both organizational personnel and the public, as happened at various points during the 2014 U.S. Ebola scare.

- Sometimes reassurance/confidence-building measures, even if not seen to be effective by experts, can help maintain public or civilian employee cooperation. Ohio and Texas schools during the U.S. Ebola outbreak fumigated their facilities because of "irrational" public fears, even though there was essentially no risk of infection. Such measures can allow normal functioning to return in situations where people can vote with their feet about whether to report to work (p. 169).

Digitalisation surely makes a substantial contribution to perception management. There is no doubt that as a consequence of the reverberations the Internet has brought about, not

only the geographical, but also administrative borders have been slipped over. Despite the free circulation of information, serious problems pertaining to trust have inevitably emerged.

It is assumed that one the most important of these problems is fake news as well as insulting and abusive messages intentionally circulated especially by trolls on social media for the intention of provoking polemics with other users. Thanks to digitalisation, such deliberate intention can be realised far more easily and effectively.

Having examined the emerging role of security in the context of digitalisation, Little, Farmer, and El- Hilali (2017) emphasize that companies of all sizes need to make sure that their records are well secured with the ability to store, access and get better. The fact is that greater records might be generated and hung on disparate pc systems. Many groups are using the technique of deploying records protection solutions to remedy quick-time period problems. Lots of those answers revolve around one vendor or hardware platform. The current facts-protection strategies are primarily based on obsolete commercial enterprise practices such as a 10-hour running day and overnight backup windows. The present-day international situation of 24-hour-a-day enterprise and digital transactions has necessitated an extended reliance on data systems. In this sense, it has also been pointed out by Little et al. (2017) that multimedia systems and communique have made extremely good progress in investigating mechanisms, policies in our running systems, dispensed structures, networks to support special kinds of allotted multimedia programs and their quality of service (QoS) parameters which includes throughput, end-to-cease postpone, loss price, and others for the last two decades. Researches in human-computer interfaces (HCI), gadget getting to know, database, and different person-driven research domains indicated via many venues the want of transition from QoS to user notion, and the close connection between QoS and perception of users. May (2006) identifies four different physical presentation media and channels of communication used in computerized control today: "the graphic media that derives from visual perception, the acoustic media that derives from auditory perception, the haptic media that derives from tactile and kinaesthetic perception, and the gestic (or "gestural") media that derives from visual perception. The gestic and the graphic should be considered as separate channels of communication because gestic media is based on the temporal dimension of movement in itself, rather than on its potential for producing graphic traces of movement…" (p. 54). Pointing out that in a culture which locates growing emphasis on happiness and well-being, multimedia technology encompasses emotional design to enhance the commercial area, Axelrod and Hone (2006) explore affective computing and illustrate how modern technology is capable of emotional recognition and show. Setting out a study with the aim of assessing the

importance of *affective computing and the capability of innovative technologies in emotional recognition and display,* Axelrod and Hone empirically show that affective systems improve user performance and satisfaction:

- WoZ (Wizard of Oz) methods were successful to simulate an affective system;

- people performed significantly better when they used the responsive system;

- after the game, people reported themselves as significantly happier when they used a responsive system;

- people reported that they think they show emotions significantly more when they are told that the system will respond to them, and most of all when they are told that it will respond but it does not do so;

- people blink significantly more if they are told that the system will respond to them;

- user behaviour was rated as more positive when the system responded to them, and most positive of all for the group who were also told that the system would respond;

- behaviour was rated as more intense for participants who were told that the system was affective (p. 123).

Kalguya (2006, p. 220) discusses that it is important to improve cognitive mechanisms that have efficiency of multimedia learning for individual users. Recent advances in our knowledge of human cognitive architecture, learning processes, and the natural world of function have created foundations for changes in mechanisms of supervision.

A study conducted by Ramos-Soler, López-Sánchez, and Torrecillas-Lacave (2018), aiming to establish a classification of minors with regard to their "perception of risk, digital consumption habits, family and/or educational protection factors, and the flow of communication" (p. 71) displays that there is a noticeable association between risk perception and the variables pertaining to families and behaviours. In Turkey there have been a few studies about digital perception management and they mostly discuss the issue in a theoretical framework. One of them (Boztepe-Taşkıran, 2018), handles perception management together with a relational paradigm that is responsible for relationship management between corporations and their target audience. In the concept of contemporary public relations where a relational paradigm dominates, practices for perception management should not conflict with public relations ethics and should focus on the purpose of building positive perceptions between corporations and their target audience. Another study of the same author (Boztepe-Taşkıran, 2016) discusses

and suggests the use of social media for better digital perception management. According to this view, companies should exist in social media platforms where they take control and should maintain a two-way communication and a dialogue in an interactive way. However, apart from controlled contents, management of misconceptions of other social media users is also significant for digital perception management.

3. Concluding Remarks

Based on these premises, it is irrefutable that the *Digital Age* has posed considerable amounts of challenges for every stakeholder wherein the speed of events is such that, even professionals of perception management can lose the plot when they intend to create a favourable impression. Additionally, without checks and balances that prevent those from going overboard, perceptions also backfire on them. This is why it is of paramount importance to adhere to some rules and structures for perception management to yield a favourable outcome – for both immediate term and longer term.

It is worthy of note that perception management, regardless of where and why it is conducted, requires a voice and a medium. In the world we live in today, the brand is the voice, and it is being heard through digital means, which is the medium. The role of marketing communication professionals is significant here, for they serve as the nexus between brands and consumers. To be the first solution in the hearts of customers, many brands have been left with no other option than to adopt perception management. Without digitalization, perception will only be possible if consumers walk up to a team member of a brand to intimate his/her opinion. The technologies that exist today, such as machine learning and data mining, together with the availability of the Internet, have bestowed power on modern day users. The consumers of today are knowledgeable about the available opportunities in a respective field. Advancement gives them the upper edge in picking products and services of their choice. In this kind of world, the importance of perception management can never be overemphasized.

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