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Walk the talk: the practitioners' perspective on mobile marketing

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Walk the talk: the practitioners' perspective on mobile marketing

1. Introduction

Wherever we look, we see people starring at their smartphones. Mobile has empowered customers and reshaped the customer journey. Mobile accounts for over 60% of Internet traffic worldwide (Statista, 2024). The retail context faces an increasing omnipresence of mobile technologies. However, 79% of purchases still take place in brick-and-mortar stores (Forbes, 2024). How do online and offline interactions occur in retail through mobile devices? The exploration of this intertwined relationship remains at an exploratory stage.

Previous studies have addressed some of the challenges regarding Mobile Marketing in retail. Bakopoulos et al (2017) raised the issue of smarter decision-making in mobile marketing. He was followed by other researchers that investigated issues such as intention to redeem coupons (Beeck; Toporowski; 2017); mobile advertising (Grewal et al, 2018); mobile targeting (Ghoose et al, 2019); location-based gamification (Kim, Song; 2020); spatial marketing (Cliquet, 2021); mobile resources (Prodanova et al, 2023) and the balance between helpfulness and privacy context-driven notifications (Kuriachan et al, 2024).

The digital consumer is constantly on the move, short of time, searching for convenience, entertainment, and fun. The Web 4.0, also known as symbiotic web, led to the interaction between humans and machines in symbiosis, with mobile devices as the hub of such process. According to Azemi et al (2022, p. 2), "understanding mobile marketing from a multichannel perspective is important for a broader understanding of the development of customers' engagement and customer acquisition during their navigation from one mobile channel to another channel".

Numerous issues arise in merging digital and physical realms in consumer proximity to physical locations, especially within the context of mobile marketing strategies. Particularly, the literature on location-based marketing remains underdeveloped and inconclusive. Therefore, this study aims to explore managerial perceptions and experiences with mobile promotions in retail, alongside key variables affecting the relationship between mobile marketing and offline store visits.

Departing from a set of in-depth executive interviews followed by content analysis, the study searched for insights regarding the role mobile plays in the path-to-purchase journey. Interviews were conducted with C'level executives responsible for managing mobile campaigns. A deeper comprehension of the mobile marketing landscape carries substantial managerial implications, enabling the development of more effective marketing strategies. Given the omnipresence of mobile devices, any marketing plan that neglects their influence would be incomplete.

2. Theoretical background

In a world devoted to screens, one has particularly trumped others. Adults spent an average of 4,8 hours per day connected on mobile devices, excluding voice activities (Data.ai, 2023). leading businesses to extend their reach to customers throughout this channel. Since 2015, Chinese and American consumers already make more purchases through mobile phones than through computers. The mobile app usage has soared. Consumers are overwhelmed with advertising whist companies are pressured to improve their performance numbers.

According to the Mobile Marketing Association (2016), mobile marketing is a set of practices that enable organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through and with any mobile device or network.

Consumers have integrated smartphones into every phase of the purchase life cycle. With the huge offer in the app market with the most varied functions and services, consumers now lack time in the agenda and space in the smartphone memory (storage space) to take advantage of all the services available in the app stores. It is a tough task to engage consumers in an app. They make dozens of downloads, but soon find no relevance and uninstall. Apps drain battery, caches data and many have high CPU power usage and, worst case scenario, are irrelevant. The so call bricks-and-clicks apps saw strong gains in total user sessions over the 2018-2022 period often out-pacing digital-first apps, which reflects how central is mobile to growing retail business (Data.ai, 2023). Throughout the consumer journey, mobile devices primarily serve purposes of education, information gathering, and engagement, rather than immediate purchasing. The act of seeking online information prior to visiting a physical store creates a sense of anticipation, heightening desire. As Verhoef et al. (2017) assert, "Mobile is the hub of omnichannel marketing and retailing, with connected customer experience playing an integral role in the physical world, influencing both consumer shopping behaviors and firms' targeting strategies" (p. 5). One pivotal area of exploration within this realm is the integration of online and offline worlds, particularly through location-based technology.

Location-based Marketing

Mobile geolocation allows retailers to design much more assertive communication strategies to attract customers to their stores, addressing the consumers when they are most receptive to it. Location-Based Marketing is based on the smartphone model, that started with the launch of iPhone in 2008. In 2011, the Mobile Marketing Association defined Location-Based Marketing as: “any application, service, or campaign that incorporates the use of geographic location to deliver or enhance marketing message/service” (p.4).

Geolocation uses a variety of different information sources to identify a user's location. As of today, with the advances in technology, there are many options to more accurate geofencing and geobehavior data. Geofencing is a virtual perimeter for a real geographic area used for the activation or delivery of advertising focused on users who are present within a certain radius of a point previously defined as a geographic coordinate, an address, a commercial establishment, etc. Geobehavior is the behavioral profile of users based on the places frequented. For example: a Geobehavior Parents group is formed by users who attend primary schools, theaters, and cinemas in schedules of children's plays and films, pediatricians and playgrounds.

Azemi et al (2022) recommend exploring mobile marketing as an integrative tool for offline and online marketing to expand understanding of mobile customers’ perceptions. For Lamberton and Stephen (2016), mobile use represents a domain of online–offline convergence and, “importantly, will require the development of a data-driven theory” (p.165). They advocate that researchers focus on understanding the marketing value of mobile technology aspects that allow marketers and/or consumers to do things that cannot be done with nonmobile technology, such as geo-located ad targeting. As companies intend to address and service customers at the moment of need, mobile is key to win.

3. Methodology

The qualitative study aimed to identify managerial perceptions and experiences about mobile promotions in detail, as well as important variables regarding the mobile marketing relationship to offline store visits. The in-depth individual interviews provide a broader perspective of the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It is also recommended to explain how people act in certain arrangements (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and to allow to the depth of the problem. In a

discipline as applied as marketing, qualitative methods enable a deeper understanding of behavior (Granot et al., 2012, p.2). Qualitative studies are inherently designed to provide explanations. The growing complexity of the managerial context asks for approaches to create action-oriented knowledge (Singh, 2015, p.132). Besides, qualitative research with executives is a path to identify further researchable topics (Jaworski, 2018).

The qualitative study followed the steps proposed by Singh (2015), based on the work of Miles and Huberman (1994). The steps were: a) research question, framework and design; b) data collection and transcription; c) line by line or chunk by chunk coding; d) code classification; e) interpreting the data and identifying salient themes; f) memo writing as the analytical handle; g) description, analysis and explanation; h) comparative analysis and refinement; i) outputs and discussion. In order to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research (Healy & Perry, 2000; Granot et al., 2012), interviewers should place participants' comments in context, reduce opportunities for idiosyncrasies and checks for internal consistency. Also, "by interviewing a number of participants, experiences can be compared and connected" (Granot et al., 2012, p.5). For Healy and Perry (2000, p.123), the validity should be a contingent one, meaning that the goal is to develop a ``family of answers'' that cover several contingent contexts and different reflective participants, albeit imperfectly. In that context, validity is about generative mechanisms and the contexts that make them contingent. Therefore, the authors utilized a two-step procedure to ensure validity. First, coding and categorizing the material into themes. Later, it was triangulated with the existing literature, and the authors met to discuss the coding and the link to existing literature.

Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with leading digital industry experts, focusing on the online-to-offline relationship, particularly regarding mobile's central role. These interviews included specialists in mobile marketing technology and geolocation. The first interviews, in July and August 2019, were set in person. The later ones, in September and October, 2020, were made using Zoom conferencing tool or WhatsApp video calls. The interviews began with mobile promotion questions adjusted to the interviewee's context. Interviews continued until no new information emerged, indicating theoretical saturation.They lasted between thirty minutes and two hours. All the responses were recorded and later transcribed. Open questions during in-depth interview stimulate a direct conversation, allowing patterns to be observed, from which categories are generated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Table 1 - Summary of respondents.

POSITION	COMPANY TYPE
VP of Global Strategy and Operation	Leading Social Media with 270 million users
Head of Marketing (Brazil)	Worldwide leading ecommerce with reported a net income of 11.59 billion U.S. dollars
General Manager	Private location awareness tech company
Business Intelligence Manager	Geolocation behavioral biometrics company
Head of Mobile Solutions	Technology services
Chief Growth Latam	Backbone data & mobile media
Connection Diretor	Marketing & Advertising
Marketing Manager	Behavioral Data
Marketing Director	Design & Branding
Head of Sales	Geolocation behavioral biometrics company

Partner	Shopping Malls
Key & Strategic Sales App Business	Nasdaq listed global technology company for impactful advertising.
CEO	Technology company that brings together data intelligence and contextualized activation.

Data Analysis and findings

Data analysis was performed based on the content of the interview transcripts and complementary materials sent by the interviewees (cases, reports, videos and ebooks). The collected data was analyzed with content analysis techniques, following the steps suggested by Bardin (2006): pre-analysis, codification, categorization, and analysis. The content analysis is commonly used as an analytical method for qualitative content (Kohlbacher, 2006). It is applied to identify any comparable and contrasting themes from which new knowledge is identified (Kohlbacher, 2006). The technique is intended to go beyond the common sense of subjectivism and achieve scientific rigor, but not the rigidity. Thus, the analysis explored differences and similarities, identifying common themes, based on the extant literature. All interpretations were supported by the interview transcripts.

Following, it was necessary to encode the material in order to treat it (Bardin, 2006, p.103). Some of the codes had been suggested by the literature; others were created in the process of reading and rereading the interviews, in a process of analyzing the content for common themes (Singh, 2015). The relevant chunks of the transcriptions were placed under broad categories. First, the initial framework, and second, the exercise of arriving at the description and explanation based on marrying inductive and deductive approach served the purpose of axial coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), searching for linkages between data. Data bias was handled by exploring consistency and inconsistency across data points. Consistency refers to similar perspective from multiple respondents and across different data points (Singh, 2015). The researcher coded data in order to probe for meaning, while at the same time relating emerging concepts back to the revised literature. The next step was the categorization of the elements, that is, creation of categories to support the analysis. Once the categories were defined, each interview was analyzed again, following the "cross-case analysis" logic (Kohlbacher, 2006).

Four main themes emerged from the narratives: a) mobile promotion and offline consumer behavior; b) mobile message content; c) mobile ubiquity and consumer context; d) conquests and challenges in the field. Each anchor theme was divided into categories (sub-themes) that were generated from both literature and field, and further analyzed. Tables were developed for each theme with the assistance of lexical research by MaxQDA 2020, in the light of mobile marketing theoretical approaches (Danaher et al, 2015; Pantano & Gandini, 2018; Tong et al, 2020).

I) Online to Offline: mobile promotions and offline behavior

While mobile remains a significant catalyst for the global growth of digital ad spending, offline sales still dominate retail outcomes. However, Tong et al. (2020, p.65) highlight that mobile devices seamlessly blend digital experiences with offline behavior, reshaping the consumer journey and uncovering fresh business prospects. Mobile increasingly functions as a central hub bridging digital channels and physical locations.

The following topics emerged: mobile as a tool for product discovery and for driving foot traffic; mobile as a source of convenience and fulfillment; and the integration of these roles into the evolving habits of digital consumers. This growing interdependence is evidenced by the interviewees:

> The digital and offline worlds are integrated into consumers' lives. Smartphones enable access to new behavioral data, as installed applications both connect and collect information. Zero moments of truth—like Google searches—influence decisions to visit physical stores. For example, in an unfamiliar city, searching "cafeteria" on a phone can determine where to go. These digital moments directly shape physical decisions, for better or worse (Connections Director).

> The most important thing is to understand which are the tools of this consumer who browses digitally and will make their purchase offline. Who will search online but will make the purchase offline (the VP of Global Strategy).

Mobile devices incorporate both a virtual information search and physical travel trajectory, providing a seamless online to offline experience (Tong et al., 2020, p.67). Mobile seems to play an important role in leading the customer throughout the purchase funnel, working first as a discovery mechanism and then, as a foot traffic generator. "*I have no doubt that the smartphone can influence the choice of where to consume" (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).* Adjusting the message to the customer journey is an attempt to adjust its timing, that is, the right message at the right moment for the right person.

> Results vary depending on the user's journey stage. In the awareness phase, video campaigns perform well, though performance and awareness are often seen as opposing goals. Video click-through rates differ from in-app display clicks. In the consideration phase, when users already know the brand, smartphone campaigns like partner promotions (e.g., Magalu and Netshoes) and app install efforts via players show strong results. Conversion campaign has to be very much in line with what the user expects (Key & Strategic Sales App Business).

> (…) find a combination of media, okay? (...) the push notification is not a retargeting media, it should be for the beginning of the funnel. Imagine a brand that you don't know, that you've never seen, showing a push with an image? It enriches the context! Now imagine a retargeting, which you see on the display media, you receive the push, sometimes five times, because retargeting is a machine gun, so imagine you receive five pushes a day, five days in a row, from the same product? You'd throw the phone on the wall (the CEO).

Mobile push notifications work as first party media, but also as media inventory for third parties. That is, a company does not need to develop an app in order to use mobile promotion, as one interviewee explains:

> (...) There are two ways: we license software so a company can hire our software and put it on their application, and they send the pushes. I have mobile apps that work as media such as Climatempo, Cittamobi, manufacturers, such as LG, Positivo, Claro operator, or there are applications that we have a business partnership. They also use the push for their necessity, but it becomes a media inventory that is marketed so then a company that doesn't have an app, or even if a company has an app. Sometimes you want to extrapolate, getting an additional audience (the CEO).

This cross-channel customer experience driven by mobile requires companies to adjust both online and offline store experiences, as the VP of Global Strategy narrated with this example:

> Companies like Best Buy had to rethink their business models after realizing they couldn't compete with giants like Amazon and Home Depot. They focused on transforming the in-store experience to keep physical sales viable. Often, customers enter stores showing online

> prices, expecting to negotiate. This behavior, driven by prior online research, shows that retailers must give consumers a reason to visit the physical store (the VP of Global Strategy).

Examples of factors influencing in-store purchases include availability, security, and product inspection. As Danaher et al. (2015, p.711) put it, "the challenge is to connect mobile promotions to actual redemption behavior". And this redemption behavior, that is, actual offline sales, is now attached to expectations created in the online world. "*The marketing decision had to do with experiencing something from the online world of the brand but also experiencing it in the real world*" (the Marketing Director). The digital stimulus reflects on the expectation that is created for the offline. The offline is the delivery of expectations created online. However, quite often the physical channel is not ready to respond to the demand generated by the digital channel. Companies are preparing for mobile push promotions, but they are not ready for consumer pull moves.

The digital consumer is short of time and eager for convenience. People search mobile for instant gratification, 24/7. The ubiquity of mobile, removing barriers of time and space, is key to such convenience. According to the narratives, this convenience can be translated both as a means to approach the offline world (i.e, expediting deliveries with the buy online, pick-up in store mode) or a means of value creation (i.e., as a time saver or for the right context – being there when the customer needs it). "*The shopping experience is no longer limited to the physical point of sale. This means that retailers should be able to provide a shopping experience that is natively networked*" (Pantano & Gandini, 2018, p.690). As a couple of narratives exemplify the power of mobile as a time saver, especially for low consideration purchases:

> Free shipping offers maximum convenience. As a customer, I no longer need to plan lists for the drugstore. Convenience creates value—beyond just price—through ease, a fluid experience, and a lightweight app. But one-click purchases require trust in the brand. For small, routine buys, the effort of going to the mall—parking, time, hassle—makes the app life-changing, even for basic clothing when the brand and size are familiar. All this should save hours of your life (the Head of Marketing).

> What does convenience mean to you? For me, saving time is worth much more (than a discount). Time, the economic value of time, is the value that grows the most. (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

Familiar with new channels, the consumer demonstrates the intention to switch between online and offline frequently in the future, increasingly joining e-commerce, opting for alternative purchasing channels and a hybrid experience.

> The number of people who wants to buy online and pick up at the physical store increased, because they can search in as many stores as they want, decide where to buy and ask to pick it up because she can get it faster than if she were to wait it arrive to her house. Another change is talking to the seller of the physical store via WhatsApp (the Head of Branding).

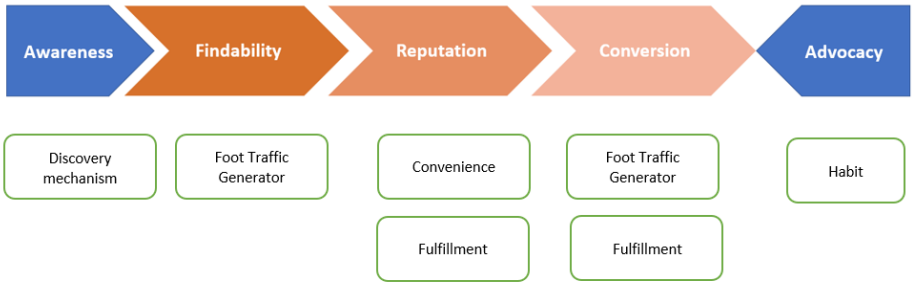
The fast pace of digitalization increased customers' expectations regarding fulfillment. Mobile can be involved in the fulfillment promise in several ways including presentation of latest inventory availability information, delivery date estimates, and options for expedited delivery, as well as delivery shipment notifications and update facilities. The issues related to freight are still relevant to the public, which can lead to disengagement. Proof of this is that 63% gave up on an online purchase because of the amount charged for shipping (research document brought by one of the interviewees). The right channel is the channel the customer is.

> We conducted a study on the omni-channel journey, asking people how they intend to shop and what multichannel attributes they value. We observed a rise in consumers who don't care if the purchase is online or offline—they just want a good experience. Comments often reflect this mindset: "Do you prefer to buy clothes online or offline?" The response: "Whatever, I just want to buy what I want, find what I want, and that it be easy" (the Head of Branding).

When it comes to app, mobile strategy focuses on the long run, it involves habit formation (see figure 1). As one interviewee explained, when the person downloads the app, it is a sign that the person trusts your company. It is a loyalty sign. Either she downloaded it because she wants to monitor promotions and receive notifications or because she is buying and wants to track the order. Or because she trusts so much and knows that she will always look for things there. "There is trust behind an app" (the Head of Marketing). And a clear marketing goal is to win brand lovers, people loyal to the brand, to the service you provide or to the product.

> "Using the app, downloading the app, is an explicit sign of loyalty. At least of intent on loyalty, that I somehow trust you. This is very good because it means that I am investing now and it will bring me results in the long run. Because trust and loyalty are about long-term value" (the Head of Marketing).

Figure 1 – Mobile promotion and the customer journey.



II) Mobile Message Content

The content strategy plays an important part in mobile marketing plans. If, on one hand, mobile message has the potential to reach the customers at the right place and at the right time, on the other, it offers the challenge of talking to a distracted consumer on small screens. As posed by one of the interviewed companies' slogan: "we are mobile artisans creating big ideas that fit small screens". When it comes to mobile message content, the following topics emerged: personalization, engagement and usability.

The mobile technology allows for "anywhere, anytime" messages. But since the smartphone is the most intimate device consumers own, such message communications are particularly prone to be perceived as highly intrusive and are likely to cause annoyance when they are deemed irrelevant. Thus, a critical issue to unleash mobile capabilities is to communicate mobile messages in ways that are consistent with people's needs and preferences (Phang et al., 2019). "*The more I segment, the less opt-out I will have, as the message will interest you more*" (the Head of Marketing). *"The message strategy has to be related to the conversion funnel. The content must be adjusted to the moment of the person's journey. People have different moments with brands. Each step of the funnel will offer you a more suitable call-to-action*" (the Connections Director). "*Customization pays off, and it's not in my opinion, it's in the opinion of the numbers. (...) it is a fact that if the segmentation is well done, it works*" (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

Short-message-service (SMS) mobile coupons offer an affordable, rapid dissemination method that can be tailored based on location, personal details, and past purchasing behavior. The coupons expiration length should be shortened to help signal time urgency (Danaher et al., 2015):

> Thinking about how to get the consumer's attention: context. A company that works well is Ifood, with fun messages at the right times. (...) Besides the emotional triggers, there are several psychological triggers that can be worked on. For example, people prefer 50% discount to a $ 10 discount, and sometimes 50% represents only $ 7. The issue of "only until today", is another emotional trigger. If I don't buy today, I won't buy more at this discount. These emotional triggers work, but it will depend on the consumer profile. We have to contextualize it at the end of the day, hence the wealth of data. Companies use very little from the data they can get from customers. (...) Few companies have this accuracy in curating a message (the Connections Director).

Privacy calculus theory (PCT) states that consumers make privacy-based decisions by evaluating the benefits any information may bring against the risk of its disclosure (XU et al., 2011), and that perceived benefits have more significant influence than the perceived risks/costs (WANG et al., 2015). On one hand, there is an increasing criticism on how algorithms encourage people's addictions and break their privacy. On the other, the algorithms offer the ability to make lives easier through personalized offers of what we need:

> I train all my browsers, I teach them to give me the things I want to see, I found my apartment training the Instagram algorithm (...) just like the Matrix film, you can also become aware of what it is (the algorithm), and use it to your advantage (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

> We started to analyze how people behave based on linguistic elements. So, what is the best way to talk to this person who is close to converting or to another person who is yet at the beginning of the purchase journey? This methodology that we did, this behavior analysis, this linguistic analysis gave a guideline for us on how to communicate in each step of the customer journey (the Head of Branding).

Mobile devices provide "interactive features to engage customers" (Tong et al., 2020, p.64), such as cameras, speakers and text communication features. And engaged customers provide higher revenues in the long run, hence the struggle for achieving customer engagement via mobile.

> We realized that if we segment a person only by online or only by offline behaviors, the result was not the same as when we crossed this information, so we crossed it, the average provided results eight times greater than using only one vertical. (...) That's why in the case of Telecom X we used what we call O + O {online plus online} segmentation (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

The role of mobile is intrinsically attached to easiness of use, hence the naturality that the UX and usability themes came up. "*Many companies are realizing the importance of investing in user experience, so that the design be as intuitive as possible*" (the Head of Mobile Solutions).

III) Mobile Ubiquity and Consumer Context

The ubiquitous character of mobile makes it omnipresent in the customer journey. Mobile is a handful for targeting moments of relevance. The topics related to the contextual trait of mobile that emerged were geolocation, location-based promotions, customer service and logistics.

One of the great challenges for marketers is to be able to talk to people at times when they are most receptive to the brand message. Companies seem to be putting a great effort into identifying the step of the journey the customer is at (Pantano & Gandini, 2018). That seems to be the current interpretation of targeting moments of relevance. However, mobile marketing is set apart from other marketing strategies by its hyper-context personalized targeting, that is, location, time, environment, companion, and dynamic competition (Tong et al., 2020). Such data is provided by hyper-context information provided by GPS, accelerometer, sensor and gyroscope, among other things (i.e., social media listening and customer search intent). For instance, in this mobile campaign exemplified by one of the interviewees:

> The user landed on a dynamic landing page, in an add, activated by geolocation. The landing page was never the same, it varied according to the geolocation (the page showed the cell phone recharge points next to the user). That is an example of of mobile customization. (...) then we monitored the visits at twenty-two thousand sale points to see how many store visits happened. (…) (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

Indeed, distance has been shown to influence consumer response (Danaher et al. 2015). The fact that the campaign created a personalized, interactive map, refers to what Hubert et al. (2017) posited, that when mobile shopping makes use of location information, customers consider it to be better designed. In addition to the number of impressions and clicks, the company delivered the number of calculated routes. Regarding metrics, "*the campaign and the report were externally audited with visit and geolift metrics. Geolift is the effect of the campaign on visitation of those impacted*" (the Chief Growth Officer Latam). A couple of interviewees explained the difference between geolift and attribution:

> We were also able to have a view of the geolift, that is, the effect of the campaign on the visitation of those impacted. This effect is isolated by comparison with the variation of the control group, which was not affected. The result of this difference is attributed to the campaign. Considering all segments, we had an average geolift of 4.54%, that is, analyzing the visits before and during the campaign period, we can conclude that there was an increase of visits to the point-of-sale (the Chief Growth Officer Latam).

> In digital media, attribution is clearer—you track clicks and purchases within a time window. Now, we use inference metrics. From a controlled user base, we analyze how many store visitors were previously exposed to our media. We segment them: new visitors, returning after 30+ days, or recent ones. But we can't confirm media drove the visit. Unlike digital, where a click shows intent, offline journeys involve many influences—push notifications, TV, radio, billboards (the CEO).

> Mobile media has to be contextual and there is an example that I really like. We did a campaign once for a non-alcoholic beer. The motto of the campaign was for sportsmen. We wanted to catch the guys who practice sports during the week, who often don't want to have a beer during the week because they don't want to disturb the next day's sports routine, especially those who practice sports early in the morning. (…) Thinking about geolocation, the client wanted to impact people when they arrive at the gyms and parks. But it makes no sense to talk about beer early in the morning. It is one thing for you to geolocate the segmentation, another thing is the context. Instead, we proposed to talk to people that have the habit of running, who have the habit of going to the gym the push had to be sent latter (the CEO).

That campaign is about content relevance, it refers to the degree to which mobile location-based advertising is uniquely tailored to the target consumers' preferences and needs (Xu et al., 2009). Mobile technologies are always referred to as the anywhere, anytime tools, as they alleviate both spatial and temporal constraints. Hence, managers often wonder how the time and space dimensions could be used to increase mobile promotion effectiveness. Context is not just about when can you get more many clicks, but also when people are more open to purchasing. As one interviewee explains, people click a lot in Social Media during late nighttime, but it does not mean that I am willing to fill out a form to purchase something at bedtime. The contextual factors are important to perform mobile targeting (Phang et al., 2019).

One of the interviewees used the metaphor of geolocation as the real-life cookie (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm). The places a person goes to reveal a lot about them: routine and habits, tastes and possible needs, their behavior profile. And nowadays, the smartphone usually accompanies us in practically all daily activities. Providers of MLBA (mobile location-based advertising) need to ensure their personalization efforts include sending the most relevant message to mobile users at the most relevant time and when the user is in the most relevant location (Gutierrez et al., 2019, p.302).

> Location acts as a filter, but true contextualization comes from product usage and digital behavior. Mobile data enables more assertive communication. This sophisticated process relies on a tripod: IoT, Big Data, and AI. Mobile devices capture data, it's sent to the cloud, and algorithms identify and cluster users to deliver the right message (the Connections Director).

By sending the consumer messages that are tailored to their interests, identity, location and time, mobile location-based advertising offers the benefits of contextualization (Gutierrez et al., 2019, p.297). Mobile coupons might enable stores to offer smaller discounts if the proximity and time is convenient to consumers (Danaher et al., 2015, p.711). For instance:

> My father, he was always very technologically developed, so he goes based on geolocation to see which services are closest to him so that he can optimize his schedule (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

Another use of geolocation information is for geofencing: “For example, Ifood, which segment the restaurants that are close to customer X to make an announcement from there” (Key & Strategic Sales App Business). As the interviews showed, mobile coupons are all about time and place (Danaher et al., 2015, p.711). Another interviewee explains how geolocation information can be used for competitive targeting or behavioral targeting:

> Let's say that I work for Arcos Dourados and I want to know who the people are that pass in front of McDonalds. From the moment the company can that, it manages to campaign for that specific audience, focusing on increasing sales for that particular McDonalds. In other words, the interest of companies is to understand who the users are and from that try to bring a conversion. (Key & Strategic Sales App Business).

> The client must allocate different weights for store visits. For instance, targeting a customer who frequents McDonald's weekly can reinforce their loyalty, but the investment in retaining them may be less than that for someone who hasn't visited in six months, or worse, has patronized a competitor like Burger King. This nuanced analysis extends to competitors' data as well. Therefore, the store visits metric has been oversimplified in the past the CEO).

Geolocation strategies seems to work best with a multiple combination of data points. As the Chief Growth Officer LatAm explained: "*It is on a large scale that you will be able to optimize large flows of people. To take people to a single point, do leafleting. Just as in digital, you need to have space for optimization so you can have better results*".

> I ask clients if the visits they're buying are from new customers. As a geolocation company, I can precisely target frequent visitors to places like McDonald's, unlike digital media, which lacks access to retailer cookie pools. Geolocation offers clear insights into whether they're attracting new, recurring, or competitor customers—without needing retailer data. Many clients don't grasp this, showing a need for greater market maturity (the CEO).

The use of geolocation feature goes beyond advertising targeting. Such precious information has also been used to logistics decisions. "*Now the product goes to the person, not the other way around. So, where the person is becomes an issue. Even from a global perspective (...) Geolocation begins to show real challenges, which is ... logistics*" (the Marketing Director).

Geolocation: Overhyped or Underrated? While some interviewees reaffirmed and praised the potential of geolocation, others questioned its feasibility.

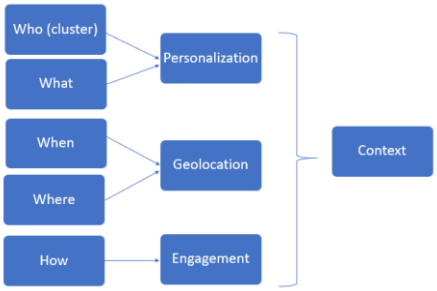
> Once you bombard me with numerous push notifications, I start losing interest in your offerings. The essence of the customer journey lies in first-party information, which the company owns. On the other hand, geolocation data often requires a third party to foot the bill for accessing user location information. Is it worth investing in building this data cluster? Absolutely. However, the key consideration is the additional expenditure involved. This parallels the scenario with Data Management Platforms (DMP) in programmatic media – while they offer great potential, the extra costs can erode campaign margins and render them unprofitable (the Key & Strategic Sales App Business).

Geolocation offers exciting potential for driving offline conversions by tracking users' visits to physical stores impacted by digital ads. This innovative approach provides retailers with real-time insights into the effectiveness of their digital campaigns. However, barriers such as costs and reliance on third-party data hinder the widespread adoption of this marketing strategy.

> It's not just about volume, but perceived value. Highly targeted campaigns require more planning and creativity than broad ones. Though CPM may be $70 vs. $5, you're reaching the right audience—not all of São Paulo. Targeting boosts effectiveness, but attribution remains a challenge. For those who understand the math, higher funnel costs are justified by better ROI. For others, the price can seem daunting (the CEO).

Figure 2 illustrates the pillars of mobile context. It includes not only location, but also customer data and the appropriate approach.

Figure 2 – Approach to mobile context



IV. Conquests and Challenges

The proliferation of mobile technologies makes possible to go beyond the real-time snapshot of consumers' static location and contextual information (Ghose et al., 2019). Yet, this is a new game that just a few companies have learned how to play well, due to the many tasks, rules and challenges it involves, such as clustering, cohort analysis, privacy issues, attribution and performance measures. At the end, reality is still beyond promises.

> This possibility is not utopian as there are already companies that do, but it is a minority. Most Brazilian companies are not even structured to make the CRM work. LGPD will help companies look better at their data (the Connections Director).

> Personalized and geolocated actions are still a little incipient, even because the costs are high. This part of geolocation is not a cheap thing, few companies do it and therefore it also increases the costs. (the Key & Strategic Sales App Business).

Mobile is able to offer metrics that are more precise than other channels, providing a much wider range of information to understand the consumer responses. Along with the increase in consumer data, discussions about privacy and the conscious use of technology are also growing: "today, the biggest question mark is the data and the use of the data" (the VP of Global Strategy).

> The challenge now is data management. If I have a user that has on average eighty-two applications installed, and that at least half of them accepts to share data, that is, I have a lot of different data sources. Plus, I need to stop to think if I really want to produce an app, how relevant this really is to my consumer (the Connections Director).

The pay per visit cost can be an illusion of safeness for media. As the CEO explains: "If a customer says: I'll pay X reais per visit, I have an idea of the conversion rate, of the average ticket, so a rule of three here, I almost have no more risk of doing media. I say: think twice".

Dealing with data involves dealing with personalization, with clustering and with privacy issues. Because of data privacy laws, business models based on personalized advertising will require building a relationship of trust with consumers. Data may not be passed on to third parties without the express consent of the data subject. And the data cannot be used for a purpose other than the pre-defined one. That is, data can only be used with consent within the specified purpose.

> Companies will no longer be able to hold information to know who that user is (LGPD). That is, as much as they know that a certain user is passing in front of a bank branch, they cannot know that the person is Mary or John. (the Key & Strategic Sales App Business).

> That's why I say that you need a data ecosystem (...) you have to gather the pieces of data

> that come from aggregators, first party, second party, third party (...) all anonymously, all this to make a look alike of people (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

In this process, respect to privacy policies is essential:

> Behavioral targeting must respect GDPR privacy rules—excluding sensitive categories like hospitals or churches. Acceptable offline criteria include visits to places like restaurants or gyms, location behavior, installed apps (noting children may install apps on parents' devices), device type, and mobile operator (the BI Manager).

Marketers should be aware that consumers are more sensitive to feelings of irritation/annoyance from the interruptions of mobile location-based advertising than by the fact that their personal data has been used (Gutierrez et al., 2019). Therefore, efforts need to be made to reduce mobile users' perceptions of intrusiveness.

> The trilogy of the digital revolution involves: IoT, Big Data (we are talking about data zetabites) and algorithms with artificial intelligence. From that moment I begin to better understand people's behavior in their intimacy. (...) This construction makes it possible for us to have a very precise level of accuracy to the point of creating the proper arguments to make the person leave their home and enter a physical store. (the Connections Director).

> Much has been said about O2O as if there were a passage between two separate worlds, online and offline, but the reality of things shows us that reality is O + O, that is, already fully hybrid with syncretic gates and in most cases, implemented through the almost omnipresence of mobile devices (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

Location-based advertising is a means for advertisers to reach out through personalized messages sent directly to mobile phones using their geographic location. Hence, the mobile phone users' willingness to disclose their location and other personal information is essential piece of such strategy (Gutierrez et al., 2019, p.295). Despite the existence of more sophisticated mechanisms such as attribution platforms, the good old email seems to be still commonly used as an on-off attribution tool, as the Head of Branding posited: "What people normally use now as a key identifier is the email. So, if I go to a store (…) through this email it makes the match with the base and it is understood that it is the same person". Yet, everything could also be captured by the smartphone ID, to monitor consumer behavior. The modern CDP (customer data plataforms) already allow for identification through multiple data sources.

> Omnichannel attribution in general is a challenge. I will give you an example of a large (bank Y) that had avolume X of organic installation. But there is no such thing as organic installation. This guy took some path that led him to download the application from the bank. My honest view is that there is no such thing as organic attribution. Somewhere in the conversion line there was something that pulled the trigger. But it is very difficult to know at what time or channel this happened (the Key & Strategic Sales App Business).

> The biggest challenge of the market is to know how to handle and use this (mobile) data for a more qualified, individualized communication, in a hyper segmented way. Which is what happens when Netflix tells you that that series is 97% relevant to the guy. For your wife, it will be 84% relevant, for your friend, it will be 57%. This is a hyper segmented curation, based on data (the Connections Director).

The evolution of mobile technology has transformed data capabilities from static to dynamic communication, amplifying the significance of clustering, cohort analysis, and privacy considerations. Interviewees underscored challenges in data management and performance. Effective data management entails building robust data pools, leveraging IoT, and employing algorithms to enhance targeting and measurement. Despite these hurdles, improving the quality and relevance of mobile promotions could mitigate users' perception of intrusiveness on such personal devices. However, the extensive possibilities beg the question: at what cost to companies? Will the outcomes justify the investment? These questions underscore the complex challenges facing the mobile landscape in the foreseeable future. "*The smartphone, the way we know it, must have another 10, 15 years of life. The concept of mobile is intrinsically related to the concept of mobility, because you are ubiquitously reached by technology"* (the Chief Growth Officer LatAm).

Conclusions, limitation, and recommendations for future research

The analysis of in-depth interviews revealed the following themes: a) how mobile promotions affect consumer offline behavior; b) the importance of mobile message content; c) mobile ubiquity and its relation to consumer context; d) conquest and challenges brought by the mobile era. The analysis privileged respondents' words to ensure validity of the findings.

Interviews were conducted with C-level executives engaged in mobile promotion, revealing that the essence of effective mobile marketing transcends mere geolocation—it hinges on context. Success lies in understanding when, where, and how to engage consumers in a manner that truly resonates with them, emphasizing relevance. Both message content and geolocation serve as vital components of this contextual approach. The study also unveiled the broader implications of contextualization compared to personalization within the mobile realm. While initial digital advancements facilitated personalization, mobile data now enables contextualization. Currently, the smartphone serves as the primary device facilitating the ubiquity required for this process. It is the advent of the "brand in the hand" marketing era, as predicted by Sultan & Rohm (2005).

Jaworski (2018) emphasizes that interviews with senior marketing executives offer a field-based perspective on specific issues and the challenges encountered by firms or executives in addressing them. From an academic standpoint, these interviews delve into both the dependent variable (the issue at hand) and potential independent variables influencing success (factors predicting improvement or creating barriers). According to the insights gathered, key variables impacting success include the customer journey stage, geobehavior, location, usability, personalization, and privacy considerations.

The main limitation is related to the verification of the study and the impossibility of statistical generalization of the obtained data. The findings are not generalizable to other contexts without further research. However, the qualitative study can arrive to analytical generalizations (Healy & Perry, 2000). Another limitation is that the quality of the results depends largely on the researcher's ability to conduct the interview. Besides, one should also bear in mind potential limitations resulting from interviewee's bias, a risk in the coding process. Securing access to C-level executives, given their demanding schedules, posed a significant challenge. Further inquiries from the area tend to be made using advanced technologies and under a causal perspective. Future investigations could explore integrating geodata with other consumer data to inform decision-making points. Additionally, incorporating interviews with telecom players could yield valuable insights into this domain.

The content analysis suggests a shift from the traditional Online-to-Offline (O2O) model to an Online plus Offline (O+O) model, wherein online and offline channels are seamlessly integrated

into the customer journey, with mobile transitioning from merely bridging the gap to becoming an intrinsic part of the path. Companies are increasingly adopting mobile targeting strategies that blend locational and behavioral aspects (from geolocation to geobehavior), as indicated by the findings. Furthermore, leveraging data to personalize content delivery enhances conversion rates.

The concept of "location" has evolved beyond physical coordinates to encompass consumer context—considering the consumer's mindset and decision-making process. Geodata plays a pivotal role in segmentation, impact assessment, and attribution. Different types of geo messages—competitive, proximity, and behavioral—offer diverse engagement opportunities, albeit with associated costs such as partnership data, server resources, and dedicated BI teams.

Efforts to translate location data into meaningful customer experiences are ongoing. However, managing the sheer volume of data generated by Mobile Marketing remains a formidable challenge for managers in the foreseeable future.

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