

Shoppable content: the new instrument in the world of e-commerce (Presenting some experiences)

المحتوى القابل للتسويق: الأداة الجديدة في عالم التجارة الإلكترونية (عرض بعض التجارب)

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Received : 15/12/2019

Accepted: 31/01/2020

Published:31/01/2020

Abstract:

This study aims to introduce one of the concepts that will create a hype in the following years, which is shoppable content. Through identifying the term, defining its different types and finally presenting experiences of some companies and brands that have integrated the content in their commerce and have turned it shoppable.

The study concludes to several results, mainly: the integration of content in e-commerce is a new instrument in the field of marketing that can help companies increase their section of consumers through turning readers and viewers into buyers.

keyword: shoppable content, shoppable articles, shoppable videos, shoppable images

JEL classification code : XN1, XN2

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة لتقديم واحدة من المفاهيم التي ستسبب ضجة في السنوات القادمة وهو المحتوى القابل للتسويق، من خلال تحديد المصطلح والتعريف بأنواعه وأخيرًا تقديم تجارب بعض الشركات والعلامات التجارية التي دمجت المحتوى في تجارتها وجعلتها قابلة للتسويق. وخلصت الدراسة إلى مجموعة من النتائج، أهمها: دمج المحتوى في التجارة الإلكترونية هو أداة جديدة في مجال التسويق يمكن أن تساعد الشركات على زيادة شريحة المستهلكين من خلال تحويل القراء والمشاهدين إلى مشترين الكلمات المفتاحية: المحتوى القابل للتسويق، المقالات القابلة للتسويق، الفيديوهات القابلة للتسويق، الصور القابلة للتسويق.

تصنيف JEL : XN1, XN2

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1. Introduction :

As it stands today, there are up to 24 million stores that sell goods and services online, which makes e-commerce the biggest market in the world. Having recently reached \$1.6 trillion in size, e-commerce is expected to grow at double digits in the future. In fact, the slice of the whole e-commerce pie is becoming larger as we speak: offline sales are tanking, more and more people are shopping online, and the global commerce in general is experiencing a dramatic shift from physical to digital retail.

While the product's volumes are constantly increasing, today's consumers are presented with an endless amount of choices. As a result, their purchasing behaviour is changing due to other trends, such as increase in mobile and the expectation to access anything, anywhere, and at anytime. On top of that, today's consumers also have a shorter attention span, less time to make decisions and, most importantly, a huge need for unique, authentic values that e-commerce has not yet really offered.

In today's e-commerce market, millennials and post-millennials are the most powerful driving force behind most of the purchasing decisions in the world. The thing to remember about them (especially about females) is that they favour fun and energizing shopping environments more than anything else. They also value trusted advisers and counselors who help them make better purchasing decisions. In marketing terms, content is the perfect tool to target modern generation tanks to its brilliant mixture of entertainment and education. However, there is another thing about millennials to consider: millennials are impatient and they want all processes to be fast, efficient, and seamless. They know what they want, and they want what they want when they want it. That is to say, millennials need instant gratification and instant access to have what they want right away immediately. Moreover, they demand an effortless transition between the experiences—the shift from content to purchase must be smooth and quick

According to what is sited above we can conclude the following questions:

What is shoppable content, and how does this concept work?

To address this problem and take actions on the aspects that make up the themes of this subject, we have divided it in the form of sub-questions, which are:

- ❖ What is e-commerce?
- ❖ How could we integrate content with commerce?
- ❖ What is shoppable content, and what are its types?
- ❖ Which companies have integrated the shoppable factor in its contents?

Objectives of the study:

This study aims to adress the following objective

- Defining e-commerce;
- Recognizing the ways of integrating the content in e-commerce;
- Defining the shoppable content as a new trend in markteting;
- Determining the types of shoppable content;
- Analyzing the experiences of some companies in integrating content in e-commerce.

2. An introduction to e-commerce:

Electronic commerce, commonly known as e-commerce or ecommerce, paradigm was first known in 1993. It might be described as business-to-consumer and business-to-business commerce conducted using Internet or other electronic networks (Dovile.G, 2014) or basically trading in products or services using computer networks, such as the Internet. E-commerce draws on technologies such as mobile commerce, electronic funds transfer, supply chain management, Internet marketing, online transaction processing, electronic data interchange (EDI), inventory management systems and automated data collection systems. Modern electronic commerce typically uses the World Wide Web for at least one part of the transaction's life cycle, although it may also use other technologies such as e-mail (Mengrui, 2015).

As using the Internet becomes more widespread, businesses are taking advantage of this media to reach prospective customers and offer them products and services (Özdemir, 2010). Thus, consumers have discovered a new way to do their shopping as easily and rapidly as they wish. In order to surf successfully the wave of growth, brands will need to seriously reconsider their marketing strategies and adjust them according to the new e-commerce landscape. If they do not, they run the very real risk of getting lost in the crowd (Smartz, 2019).

3. Content and commerce: the Royal Wedding

Shoppability is the ability of transforming consumers' needs and desires into purchases. This impressive feat is accomplished by marshalling all of an organization's assets, people, places and practices to deliver rewarding shopping experiences to customers (R. Burke, March 2005)

Seth Godin explained the reason behind this phenomenon, pointing out that people do not want to buy goods and services. Instead, they want to buy relations, stories, and magic. The 21st century's marketers prefer to plant magic into content, deftly cultivating it in order to produce a new 'crop' of customers. The result is that more and more brands are getting serious about content. In other words, content in e-commerce is now thriving. Nevertheless, when it comes to content and e-commerce, it appears that these two have previously existed separately from one another, although there were stories accompanying products even before 'content marketing' became a trend. Yet those stories were never fully integrated in the shopping process. Similarly, products were never fully integrated into the storytelling process either. However, things have radically changed when content became shoppable (Styla, 2016).

Therefore, joining content with commerce is a reason for fanfare as conversion increases. As content moves closer to the consumer, deft brands are lubricating the purchase funnel and reducing dependency on traditional media partners. New direct to consumer offer brands a chance to stray from traditional formats and present and deliver content that offers relevance and resonance, in contrast with reach and frequency.

4. Shoppable content

In 1997, Bill Gates said, "content is king". Now, almost 20 years later, the digital marketing world is still scrambling to fulfill this promise, as it shifts its interest to what consumers truly want from brands: engagement. Brands are spending billions to create unique content for their marketing efforts, everything from social media channels, YouTube, videos and blogs, which all require constant content updating for continued user engagement (Schimk, 2016).

4.1. Defining shoppable content :

As defined by Gartner, "Shoppable content refers to videos, images and other rich media formats that trigger commercial transactions when a user selects an object representing showcased merchandise (such as a hot spot, a button, an image or a video of a dress or gadget)" (Lowndes, 2016). Shoppable content is, also, any type of content (i.e. videos, articles, images, etc.) that provides a direct purchasing opportunity and allows consumers to either add products to cart directly from what they are viewing or be taken to a product page and continue to shop therefrom (Smartzter, 2019).

Gartner states, "Consumers expect to shop and buy when and how they want. Shoppable media is a merchandising technique that empowers brands to present their offerings at the moment of desire, winning new customers in their preferred context" (Lowndes, 2016).

Shoppable content is an innovative way for brands to offer consumers direct links to purchase items featured in their content. With shoppable content, marketers can deliver a more engaging experience that directly affects purchases and, therefore, results in a higher return on investment on the content which they are investing heavily in (Schimk, 2016).

The key idea of shoppable content is to satisfy the immediate purchasing desire that content creates in the heart of readers. Think, for example, about all those times when you were reading a magazine, flicking through its glossy pages with models wearing beautiful things, and thinking "Hey! I want that!" — and not being able to do anything about it. Traditional content formats are not capable of satisfying

whimsical desires (Styla, shoppable content: the new trend in content marketing?, august 2016).

4.2. Why shoppable content?

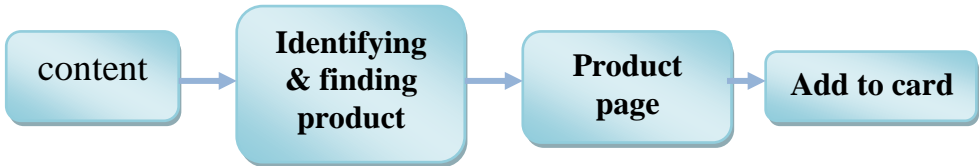
According to Gartner, engaging content shopping experiences presented in a convenient digital context can (Lowndes, 2016):

- ❖ Attract new customers through creative, shareworthy discovery vehicles;
- ❖ Encourage upsell and cross-sell of outfits, sets or use cases for increased average order value;
- ❖ Enable high-margin, data-rich direct brand-to-consumer sales relationships;
- ❖ Overcome ad skipping and blocking behaviour in many contexts;
- ❖ Counteract the commoditizing effects of online price competition and side-by-side comparisons;
- ❖ Provide near-real-time insights on the most compelling creative and side-by-side comparisons.

The need for this innovation lies in the fact that today's consumers are expecting more than what the brands have been offering before. In this technologically advanced age, people do not want to just buy a product, they also want to have an **interesting story** and a **memorable experience** associated with it. Slowly, more and more brands are embracing this idea, presenting a narration for their consumers which sparks interest, evokes feeling and inspires them through storytelling. In the long run, this is the key to successfully selling a product (Smartzter, 2019).

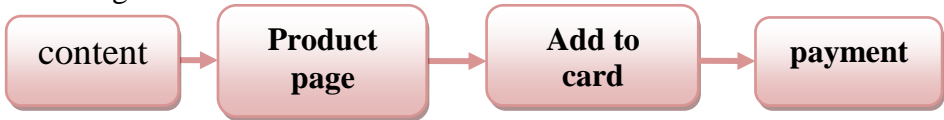
Even in digital magazines or blogs, the journey from content to commerce could take a long while: the reader still has to go through several steps to finally buy a product that he or she is interested in. But if content becomes instantly shoppable (i.e. if the buying funnel is simplified), the "shopping queue" simply ceases to exist. All it takes is for the customer to click, add the product to a shopping cart, and keep

reading the article (Styla, shoppable content: the new trend in content marketing?, august 2016). Hence, modern shoppable technologies erase the gap between content and product by **reducing the number of steps** needed to make a purchase. In other words, instead of this model:



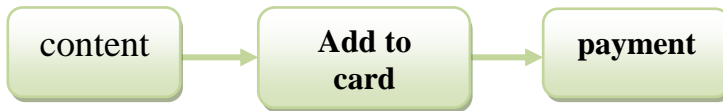
Source: Smartzer, 2016,p8

Shoppable technology can **shorten** the conversion process to something like this:



Source: Smartzer, 2016, p.8

Or in some cases, even this:



Source: Smartzer, 2016, p.8

As the result, the less steps there are between seeing a product and being able to purchase it directly, the higher are the conversion rates. Another struggle in traditional content marketing is that there has been a great difficulty to understand ROIs and accurately measure the effectiveness of content as such. So far, there has been no clear way to estimate conversions and click-through rates, making it difficult arduous to predict how effective content is when it comes to sales 83% of B2C content marketers put as the highest priority. On the contrary, shoppable content makes it easy to monitor all the click-throughs and see which parts of the story people interact most with.(Smartzer, 2019).

4.3. Types of shoppable content:

Although shoppable content is a new trend, you can see it everywhere in the e-commerce industry:

4.3.1. shoppable articles

The first thing to understand about shoppable articles is that they are, first and foremost, like any other articles following the basic narration principle aiming at bringing true value by educating, entertaining, inspiring and engaging the readers. The storytelling aspect is still a priority. But what makes shoppable articles stand out from the crowd of content. the seamlessly integrated shopping opportunity. The shoppable technology builds a bridge between an e-commerce store and a content platform (e.g. online blog or digital magazine), integrating existing products from an online shop into an article. Then, every product image (be it a photo or a gif) is assigned a “Buy It Now” or “Go To Shop” option that allows to either add the product directly to cart or proceed to a product page for a full description. This way, a single piece of content becomes a powerful shopping channel that smoothly converts readers into consumers without any effort (Smarterz, 2016).

Take Net-A-Porter*, for instance. It is a huge luxury fashion e-tailer that was the first one to embrace content marketing as such. Not that long ago, they created two digital editorials called The Edit, for women, and The Journal, for men. They look like any other online magazine, with the exception that all fashion pieces featured are directly shoppable. Thus, with one click, the reader gets redirected to the relevant product page (Styla, shoppable content: the new trend in content marketing?, august 2016).

Alternatively, articles can also be directly shoppable, in which case the reading experience would not be interrupted. A good example to illustrate comes from Baukjen, a London-based womenswear brand. On their website, Baukjen runs a digital magazine where readers can immediately add any product from content to cart, buy it directly from articles or the whole blog feed (Smarterz, 2019).

4.3.2. Shoppable videos:

Video consumption is projected to hit 80% of global online traffic by 2020. 86% of marketers currently use video content in online campaigns because key messaging is retained for 95% more through

* for example, see: <https://www.net-a-porter.com/dz/en/porter/article-42ac6840fafa240/fashion/fashion-memo/micro-trend-bodysuit>.

videos (influcity, 2018). Online videos are becoming a key marketing channel for brands. As Internet connection becomes faster, devices more powerful and mobile phone screens more browsable, online videos are becoming a preferred way for consumers to receive marketing messages from their favorite brands. As a result, shoppable video content is becoming a marketing tool for brands (Weinswing, 2018).

Shoppable videos technology consists of online video streaming with embedded clickable links that direct the viewer to further information about the item clicked on or to a page that allows them to purchase the product (Weinswing, 2018). Just as shoppable articles engage the millennials amongst us, the emergence of interactive and shoppable videos technology aims to do the same by allowing consumers to click on products in a video to see more details with the option to shop. This creates a seamless journey from inspiration to purchase, making it as easy as possible for the consumer to explore and shop items from videos (Smartzter, 2016).

Faster connections and larger smartphone screens have made watching videos a convenient way for consumers to explore content. According to a survey of over 1,000 global consumers conducted by marketing software firm HubSpot, 54% of consumers consider videos the preferred medium to receive marketing information from brands, versus 41% opting for image-based content (Weinswing, 2018).

Consequently, some brands are even taking a step further and creating interactive shoppable videos, such as Marks and Spencer, the famous British department store. To debut their new denim collection, they created a video that allowed viewers to click on the screen and purchase immediately (Styla, shoppable content: the new trend in content marketing?, august 2016). There are also other companies offering shoppable video technology include Smartzter, Wirewax, Cinematique and Vue.ai. These firms embed a piece of software in the brands' video content to make it shoppable by matching the items shown in the video with the brand's online catalog (Weinswing, 2018).

4.3.3. Shoppable images:

New technology is weaving together content and shopping. Consumers can take pictures of items they like, search visually online and get personal recommendations based on AI-generated models (Zenith, 2017).

Other brands are harnessing the power of shoppable photography, such as One Kings Lane, a brand for interior design, which displays gorgeous, shoppable images on their website. You look at those pictures, you get inspired, you click, and you are ready to shop. It does not get any simpler than that (Styla, shoppable content: the new trend in content marketing?, august 2016).

Traditional content marketing is not enough anymore. Shoppable content is rapidly transforming the e-commerce scene, not to mention the Internet as a whole. Thus, more examples coming from all kinds of brands are yet to come. This is simply because brands need to be where the customers are, and modern millennial customers want everything to be instantly accessible and on demand. They are armed with iPhones and smart technology and have high expectations of how products should be presented as well as how fast they should be accessed (Styla, shoppable content: the new trend in content marketing?, august 2016).

5. Presenting some experiences :

With the rise of shoppable technologies, online retail brands can merge content and commerce and create unique, authentic experiences that not only help consumers make better, faster shopping decisions, but also entertain and inspire. The result is a happy consumer and a happy brand.

In this article we will present some experiences of companies that embraced the strategy of shoppable content, and we will take an example of each type of shoppable content.

5.1. shoppable articles models:

Here are some experiences about the first type of shoppable content, which is shoppable articles:

5.1.1 The Edit by Net-A-Porter

One of the very first examples of shoppable articles comes from Net-A-Porter, which built a shoppable magazine called The Edit. The reader can hover over any product, click on it and instantly be referred to the product page (Smartzter, 2016).

Net-A-Porter, the luxury fashion e-tailer, is a true master of shoppable content. First, there is The Edit, a digital weekly magazine with a celebrity spread. It is about 30 pages long, follows the traditional editorial format. It would have not been anything without its shoppable feature. As soon as you hover over any product, the “shop now” button

pops-up and redirects you to a relevant page. (*see the illustrated image –fig.1- in appendix1*). The only inconvenience is interrupting the reader's experience, but there is a simple way to work around it if you open the product page in a new tab. The Porter magazine, however, is another story. For starters, it comes in a print version. You can either subscribe and have it delivered directly to your door six times per year, or you can buy it in local bookstores, supermarkets, and stores all over the world. The magic comes when you realise that with a special Net-A-Porter mobile app that has a built-in product recognition you can scan every product displayed on the glossy pages of the magazine and immediately purchase things that have inspired you in print (Rabo, s.d.).

5.1.2. Clubhouse by Canterbury

Pushing forward the editorial-like format, the sports clothing company Canterbury created a digital magazine full of shoppable articles that allow the reader to buy products without interrupting the reading experience. This means that readers can forget about pop-ups and redirects, keep reading the article they like, and enjoy it until the end without being forced to visit to the shopping cart. (*see the illustrated image –fig.2- in appendix1*).

5.2. shoppable Videos models:

The second type of shoppable content is shoppable videos. The following are some experiences in this field:

5.2.1. Marks & Spencer

Marks & Spencer is a major British multinational retailer headquartered in the City of Westminster, London. It is listed on the London Stock Exchange and is a constituent of the FTSE 100 Index. It specialises in selling clothes, home products and luxury food products. M&S was founded in 1884 by Michael Marks and Thomas Spencer in Leeds. The company also began to sell branded goods like Kellogg's Corn Flakes in November 2008. M&S currently has 979 stores across the U.K. including 615 that only sell food products.

Marks & Spencer is the famous British department store. To debut their new denim collection, they created a video that allowed viewers to click on the screen and purchase immediately, releasing a perfect example of a shoppable video that was largely focused on storytelling but also intended to educate the consumer on the products that were featured. The shoppable functionality was used in this instance to allow consumers to explore the content much further, and linked the story to the products that could be purchased from the immediate pop up once the consumer had clicked on the product in the video (Smartzter, 2016). *(see the illustrated image –fig.3- in appendix2).*

5.2.2. Forever Faster by Puma

To debut a new collection of football sportswear, Puma created shoppable video that allows viewers to click on the screen to immediately purchase products. Whenever there is a “ready to be bought” product, a small red Puma logo appears to point out where exactly you have to click. As reported by Fashion&Mash, the video boasted a 6.9% conversion rate, earning a 24x times higher earning per click than usual in the e-commerce industry (Rabo, s.d.).*(see the illustrated image –fig.4- in appendix2).*

5.3. shoppable images models:

Not only the articles and videos could be shoppable, even images can contain a shoppable content

5.3.1. Klixel8

Klixel8 empowers brands, retailers, agencies and others to extend the value of images across a variety of media and devices. Its patented software allows the customer to create interactive hot spots in high definition (HD) images, allowing them to display multiple products in a more evocative real-world environment. Without the use of overlay icons, Klixel8 hot spots are invisible to the viewer and they maintain their interactivity at any zoom level. Tiered subscription pricing plans are available for individual customers up through small businesses. Enterprise pricing is available upon request. (Lowndes, 2016). Klixel8 places transparent, pixel-accurate hot spots over items in

an image and layers related content and links beneath. (*see the illustrated image –fig.5- in appendix3*).

5.3.2. Today’s Room Crush by One Kings Lane

The moment you enter the world of One Kings Lane, prepare to dive into gorgeous shoppable photography. To serve as a daily source of inspiration, on one hand, and to attract more potential customers, on the other hand, One Kings Lane uploads every day a new photo of a stylishly furnished room in its Today’s Room Crush category. Every piece of furniture displayed there has a hotspot mark, which leads the user to a detailed product description and an opportunity to add the product to cart and immediately proceed to checkout. Elegant and simple, this is a great example of how shoppable content can rely on beautiful imagery rather than the emotive power of words (Rabo, s.d.).(*see the illustrated image –figure6- in appendix3*)

6- Conclusion:

Traditional digital content is lacking the essential elements of storytelling as well as a fast and convenient route to purchase products. This is the reason why content is currently going through a phase of digital innovation in order to become more seamless, more interesting, and more experiential for today’s consumer. That is what we have analysed in this study, which concludes to the following results:

- ❖ E-commerce is described as business-to-consumer and business-to-business commerce conducted by way of Internet or other electronic networks;
- ❖ In the age of technology and the world wide web, everything becomes shoppable, which has created a new necessity for companies;
- ❖ That necessity is to integrate content in e-commerce and to make this content shoppable;
- ❖ Shoppable content refers to videos, images and other rich media formats that trigger commerce transactions when a user selects an object representing showcased merchandise;

- ❖ There are many types of shoppable content, the most important three are: shoppable articles, shoppable videos and shoppable images;
- ❖ Edit by Net-A-Porter and Clubhouse by Canterbury are examples of companies that integrated the content in their commerce in the form of shoppable articles;
- ❖ Marks & Spencer and Forever Faster by Puma are examples of companies that integrated the content in their commerce in the form of shoppable videos.

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8- Appendices:


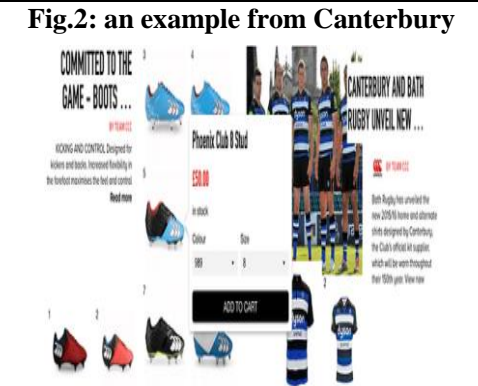
<i>Appendix 1</i>	
<p>Fig.1: an example from Net-A-Porte</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Source: (Smarterz, 2016)</p>	<p>Fig.2: an example from Canterbury</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Source: (Rabo, s.d.)</p>
<i>Appendix 2</i>	

Fig.3: an example from M&S



Source: Smartzter, 2016, p.18

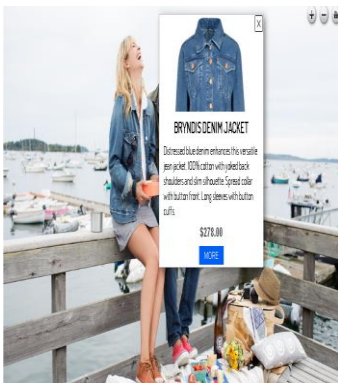
Fig.4: an example from Puma



Source: (Rabo, s.d.)

Appendix 3

Fig.5: an example from Klixel8



source: www.klixel8.com

Fig.6: an example from One King Lane



Source: (Rabo, s.d.)