Original Paper

Marketing, Digital Environment and Big Data: A Preliminary Discussion about the Influences within A Company

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Abstract

This article discusses how Big Data influences Brazilian enterprises from the view point of marketing, once there is a deepening in the use of Information Technology (IT) in the business environment and is a differentiated competitive factor, as well as for the consumer. The bibliographical research involved subjects such as the evolution of digital marketing, digital inclusion, co-creation, social media, and Big Data, to have a theoretical vision. Through in-depth qualitative research, using the Focus Group method, the impressions of professionals with academic backgrounds were collected regarding knowledge, abilities and necessary competences for these enterprises to have full results, the need for curve experience, adaptability to the exponential world, as well as the opportunities and challenges stemming from this reality. One of the highlighted points of this research was the need to be dealing in still evolving digital atmospheres and that of ethical behavior, both in the collection, dissemination, and application of digital marketing strategies, as well as in information security.

Keywords

marketing 4.0, big data, social media, competencies, corporative ethics

1. Introduction

Companies seek to ensure their economic and financial sustainability by identifying business opportunities contextualized with market trends. There was a time, for example, when a bank account holder had to stand in line to conduct a financial transaction or even make a transfer. The digital world occupies a prominent position in the banking segment, as in others, both from the point of view of the company, with computerization, as well as in the provision of services to consumers, involving solutions such as ATMs, online service, applications for transactions, even depositing checks using photography via mobile device. The benefit is the result of how services are provided, as well as marketing strategies aimed at brand consolidation and the strategic positioning of the companies. Campaigns involving topics such as sustainability, "Reading to a Child" (Itaú, 2018), digital and 24-hour banking, for example, are carried out in a traditional way (Above the Line-ATL) and in a more targeted manner, (Below the Line-BTL), in order to expand the integration of company-market communication. This article will seek to contextualize and discuss how companies and consumers are influenced by the digital environment, in order to strengthen the relationship links, monitoring it, as well as, monitoring its trends and transformations, having Big Data as a tendency to be contextualized and with the necessary knowledge for the professional.

2. Methodological Procedures

The qualitative aspect was used instead of the quantitative one, because the statistical descriptions of the units of analysis, as well as their frequency-related consequences, for example, are not the objective of this study. In addition, there is a great heterogeneity of the components of the universe, by the type of companies surveyed, as well as by the economic sectors. For this reason, the qualitative aspect was selected, justified by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), so as to understand the social practices within their natural environments, in terms of interpretations and meanings. We used the qualitative depth method - Focus Group, in order to obtain more in-depth reasons and contents about the process and consequences for a company. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 31):

> "... the descriptive details chosen by a storyteller are usually conscious or unconsciously selective, based on what he sees or hears or considers important. Although the description should always convey reliability and portray images, it must also persuade, convince, express, or arouse passions".

Thus, twenty professionals with minimum postgraduate academic training and more than five years of professional marketing experience were selected for convenience. The sample was chosen by the accessibility criterion, which, according to Vergara (2014, p. 47) is the one that, "*far from any statistical procedure, selects elements for the ease of access to them*". This non-probabilistic sample was selected from a larger group of people, with filter questions referring to professional experience and academic training. After accepting to participate in the research, a meeting was held with these twenty interviewees in order to obtain, through a script of semi-structured questions, their impressions on the subject and other developments, as well as from their personal and professional experiences. Analytical tools, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 92) enable coding based on concepts and from the most specific to the most general or abstract. In other words, coding, although based on concepts and fundamentals, requires a certain level of abstraction according to its properties and dimensions. The interpretation and analysis followed the precepts of Bardin (1977), refers to the analysis of the contents. The problematization involves how Big Data influences the marketing of Brazilian companies, since it is a trend that Information Technology (IT) has influenced companies, either through the aspects related to the company towards the market, as well as those related to consumers, most of these from Y, Z and future, *Alphas* generations. The question script was initially composed of five broad open questions, and during the course of the answers, others were incorporated. Once the participants were presented and the problematization was exhibited, the initial question was the importance and contribution of academic and professional training. Then, how this professional can obtain the competency and skills, as well as what minimum knowledge they should have to fully exercise their responsibilities. Another issue was how the company can ensure that all personal, group and integrated efforts could guarantee business sustainability. Finally, general considerations. Based on the open questions, the use of questioning as one of the analytical tools and discussion among the group members allowed for a set of results that are incorporated at the end of this article. The development of the qualitative depth method was around 1h30 minutes.

3. Digital Marketing

Marketing must satisfy the needs and desires of consumers. This statement can be discussed from various points of view, but never challenged, because the client is the beginning, middle and end of every business, being his/her satisfaction the purpose of the whole organization. This essence went through a conceptual (r)evolution that was-and still is, the reflection of the society in which we live. Based on Perreault and McCarthy (2002), the initial concept was Production, where the premise is that consumers prefer easy-to-find products and companies look for ways to cheapen production, indicating that companies must increase production volume and find ways to optimize processes in order to achieve a measure of productivity and scale economy. The idea of "factory floor" involves issues related to economic resources such as machinery, equipment, and production processes. The phenomenon of the Chinese initial economic growth is based on these assumptions, where the central objective was to offer products at lower costs and prices than the competition.

Later, this concept derived to the Product, where there was greater concern about the quality of what was manufactured, because companies understood that consumers prefer other attributes besides homogeneous products and low prices. Functionality, performance, durability, and design, among others, begin to make a difference in consumer choice. The automotive industry has gone through the production and product process in order to maintain its competitive position. If before the industry supplied standard style cars, today they seek to differentiate themselves by design, color, and other physical attributes.

After World War II, the U.S. economy had to recover from the impacts of the war period. Thus, with the increase in production and increased supply of products, the concept of sales became the focus of the companies, where the idea was to quickly release what was produced, based on the premise that consumers will only buy the amount desired by the company through strong promotion and sales stimuli. Hence the classic distinction of the concept that sales is something that aims at the short term. Certain retail categories use this concept to maintain their sales as well as differentiate themselves from the competition. With the evolution of markets and consumer growth, some companies began to lose control of the quality of what they had promised. Hence the concept of Marketing, aimed at meeting the needs and desires of consumers, where the central concern is to establish long-term commitments and relationships and sales as a natural consequence of a well-applied marketing. Kotler and Levy (1969, p. 7) state that a company should be consumer-oriented rather than the product and, consequently, with social contributions. This concept is valid to this day.

In the 1970s, the international community began to discuss the finitude of natural resources, such as water, considered a non-renewable resource, and drifting on other issues related to global warming and how international and country public policies could minimize environmental and social impacts. From this derived Social Marketing, focused on social lacks and needs, which was then incorporated into companies as a competitive differential. In Brazil, the Social Responsibility movement gained strength from the 1990s, then expanding to issues related to sustainability. Companies begin to incorporate content in their communication as to how they practice politically correct activities in order to gain positive visibility before the different stakeholders, called by Freeman (1984) as stakeholders.

Previous concepts have evolved into Marketing 3.0 (Marketing 1.0 is related to Product and Marketing 2.0 to the consumer, respectively), where people are not simply consumers, but human beings led by beliefs, values and willing to transform the reality of their lives as well as society into a better world, with moral, justice, social, economic and environmental awareness. According to Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010, p. 16), "*they seek not only functional and emotional satisfaction, but also spiritual*

satisfaction, in the products and services they choose". These choices reflect politically correct products and services that do not harm nature and are within sustainable practices. Cosmetic companies like *Natura* offer products that are not harmful to the environment, as well as extending to their raw material suppliers. In their communication, environmental awareness campaigns and other causes aimed at the continuous improvement of society can be inserted. This concept should be a flag to be defended, but not used as a simple way to promote itself in the market or obtain tax benefits. In addition to the traditional tools, categorized as ATL (Above the Line), we have the others, often from the digital world, categorized as BTL (Below the *Line*).

4. Marketing 4.0

According to Kuazaqui, Haddad and Marangoni (2019), companies, with the opening of international markets, and the need to maintain their competitive position and levels of growth, have sought new ways to do business, increase productivity and reduce operating costs. In the 1980s, companies in the industrial and retail sectors began conducting electronic transactions such as Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) to optimize logistics and supply chain. Financial institutions have also sought to streamline their processes, such as those related to communication between local and international agencies. In general, this movement towards the digital world has expanded rapidly, influencing virtually all economic segments, from private and public services, such as post offices and urban sanitation, to monitoring agricultural areas using drones and applications, establishing itself with the strong digital transformation (ROGERS, 2016). In this case, from the corporate perspective, *EMBRAPA*—Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária do Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento stands out, stemming from an informal conversation with the director of the company, as one of the most effective in the development and use of technologies for research and development of agricultural goods. From a market perspective, companies like Netflix have excelled at business model innovation as well as digital strategies. According to Cabral and Yoneyama (2001, p. 45) digital products are those that occupy only virtual physical space, such as information, entertainment, and services. They are supported by digital processes, which involves from the ordering, storage, to downloading, or in other words, the delivery of the digital product. In addition to the product, there is distribution, promotion, and price (marketing mix) so as to make the product marketable.

In view of the fact that they are intangible, one of the great benefits for developed economies is the exporting of *intangible goods*, which within the perspective of this article is directly related to *Technology*, a strategic flag defended by the Barack Obama administration, benefiting technology companies, to the detriment of production companies (factory floor), such as automakers, defended by Donald Trump.

5. Social Media

According to Kuazaqui, Haddad and Marangoni (2019), they are represented by platforms, websites, and applications that enable for the connection, relationship, and sharing of user content. The platforms were originally developed to use for exchanging information from universities with professors and students, in addition to depositing material. Platforms such as Blackboard and Canvas make it easier for schools to work, not having to develop technologies specific to their needs, nor their maintenance or upgrade. With the entry of communication groups, such as newspapers and magazines in the 1990s, there was the popularization of the environment, influencing the entry of companies and people through websites, blogs, *wikis*, sharing sites, etc., favoring the idea of creating social networks. They differ from traditional media,

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such as newspaper and magazine, because they are internet channels and with numerous possibilities for interaction, participation, and control among users. Within this concept are social networks such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and Youtube, for example and which have made them, in the last decade, the biggest influencers of communities. In short, each social network has its own characteristics that attract different profiles of users and that build groups of relationships that interact with each other and that share the same interests, desires, and experiences. Generally speaking, it is a differentiated form of market segmentation and each social network offers a list of services aimed at facilitating relationships between users, as well as accumulating data and information that serve as references for companies to advertise their business. On the other hand, companies make available on their pages important information that must be constantly monitored by *"likes"*, opinions or even the presence of fake news that influence the perception of their image.

6. Co-creation

The collaborative economy assumes that a business may suffer the contribution of third parties to its improvement and development, as is the case with Wikipedia. This process undergoes an evolution and revolution with the idea of co-creation. According to Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2014, p. 3) all companies "*must be designed as a connector axis of engagement platforms. Their role should be to organize human capacity for all stakeholders to act as co-creators and benefit from the joint creation of values*". It is a process where everyone in the Value System participates, so as to develop a business, an idea or even a product in a sustained way. According to the same authors (2014, p. 9), Nike, when developing its footwear, involves studies and analyses of its own, in addition to monitoring athletes who wear their shoes within controlled environments of use. *Kickante* is a Brazilian crowdfunding platform that aims to receive contributions towards individual projects, usually from people. Interested parties can submit proposals with the guidance of the platform experts to obtain the best volume of resources and for the projects to materialize.

7. Storytelling and Storyselling

The *National Storytelling Network (NSN)* (2018) defines storytelling as an ancient form of art and an important manner of human expression used in many ways. It originates from cave drawings and how clans gathered around a campfire to tell and perpetuate history generation to generation. In the context of this chapter, there are two categories for applying storytelling: one can tell a story with a beginning, middle and end through a means such as a post or a video. In this case, one can have a video simulating a family having breakfast and highlighting the brand of a particular product, for example. The second category is inserted within a more complex and contextualized environment, such as the consumer situation of a cosmetic that emphasizes the differential of having politically correct practices and that are also aligned according to the mission and vision of the company.

Storyselling has the direct intention of using a rhetoric that aims to sell something. The stories should involve consumers in a way that they generate positive consequences and relationship bonding. Within the story, the testimony of someone who has already consumed the product, obtained positive experiences, and really solved their problem as a consumer can be used. One realizes that when dealing with digital marketing, it is not enough to have knowledge in information technology, but of all the formats and tools available or to be developed as well.

8. Marketing 4.0 Challenges and Opportunities

One of the major challenges is digital inclusion, because not everyone has internet access, has interest, as well as the skills to use tools and new technologies. According to a survey conducted by The Economist and Facebook and commented by Meio & Mensagem (2017), Brazil is among the 10 countries with the highest number of disconnected on the Internet, representing about 70 million people. Among the reasons, the lack of access and availability, cost related to services and equipment, in addition to "*relevant content that favor the development of digital skills*" (MEIO & MENSAGEM, 2017). On the other hand, contrary to the one mentioned in the previous paragraph, we have the presence of the other consumer segment in digital media increasingly present in social media and in the use in search engines, expanding its level of updating on news and facts of companies, and may boost the co-creation of products and services of the company, according to Fox (2010).

Digital inclusion involves not only people, but also companies, which do not always have sufficient resources for investments, as well as the perception to understand the importance of information technology in their business. If, on the one hand, the digital world has been influencing marketing practices, companies have also used traditional ways of communicating to the market. In this way, the important thing is to establish a balance between what is possible within the objectives and budget of the company. This digital inclusion unfolds in digital literacy, which, according to Soares (2002, p. 151), is the "state or condition that those who adapt to new digital technology and practice reading on the screen acquire". Lévy (2004) broadens the discussion, evidencing that digital technologies involve ways of being, thinking and how to relate, using the means and tools available. Thus, the use of technology is associated with the knowledge and development of human and professional skills.

Another challenge is the monitoring of trends and their actions. With the advancement of technologies, different new proposals have emerged to produce, market, and sell products and services. If before there were large bookstores that physically sold books and had to overcome logistical and financial challenges in keeping at least the most sought-after titles on the shelves, to the detriment of the less sought after ones, the internet allowed for more extensive depths and lines to be offered, where the titles sold, in smaller quantities, have good representation compared to the most sought-after ones, in a smaller number of options. Anderson (2006) discussed Long Tail as a contemporary phenomenon stemming from digital development, emphasizing that this digital content is different from the traditional universe. As a challenge, Kim and Mauborgne (2005) present the Blue Ocean strategy, creating value outside the Red Ocean. Products are marketed in markets of great competition and consequently efforts (Red Ocean) that decrease the profit margin. Companies, considering the competition, adopt positions of differentiation, cost leadership or the exploitation of niche markets. The solution is to identify other segments of low competition (Blue Ocean) not yet explored, which contribute to business results by a single positioning. One example is the Cirque Du Soleil, which instead of developing the circus business like the others and with the same attractions, decided to discard and promote differentiated shows.

9. Big Data

More and more companies will have to understand the consumer, from a quantitative point of view and especially a qualitative profile. In this way, research methods and techniques evolve, such as in-depth interviews, Focus Group, and respective data collection instruments. One of the main challenges is to understand how the digital environment influences the consumers of each company, because it involves a set of situations that are not always the object of prediction, as well as being identifiable in the business where the company operates. It is increasingly relevant to discover new ways of collecting and analyzing data, as certified by Ito and Howe (2016). With the reality of information technology and the digital world, we have Big Data which is made up of high-speed data macroflows, with the need for the company to transform them into information that can be used in the decision-making and strategic planning process. One of the best applications refers to consumer knowledge and one of the supports is Digital Analytics, which deals with the interpretations and analysis of digital data for the continuous process of business performance improvements, according to the Digital Analytics Association (2014). We have four types of data analysis:

- Predictive: where prediction is needed, from the analysis of data over time, identifying patterns and justifications of certain behaviors. The analysis allows for the identification and analysis of trends and what types of adjustments could be made.
- Prescriptive: seeks to analyze the information on the consequences of an event. If in predictive we have the forecast, in this we have what types of products and services will be the most demanded, as well as sales models.
- Descriptive: seeks to analyze the present rather than the future, so that decisions are taken more safely and with lower risks.
- Diagnostic: seeks to analyze the relationships between causes and effects, based on the collection of cross-data that aim at understanding the current situation.

Digital evolution has allowed companies to have a greater number of data and information that sustain the decision-making process, make the most assertive decisions, anticipate problems and movements of competitors. Letouzé (2015) comments that one of the main problems is the domain of information by the private sector, which has no interest in sharing with other stakeholders part of the data obtained, thus improving the quality of Big Data. Another problem is that not everyone fully uses mobile devices, frequents or participates in social networks, among others, which serve as a basis for data extraction. According to Rotella (2012), in a counterpoint to Letouzé, companies should treat data as corporate assets, managing data in their business units, globally and locally. This allows for the sharing of market and product data, generating opportunities for sales, customer retention and cross-selling, for example. One of the company's biggest challenges is to identify information needed to discover new opportunities, bottlenecks, standards and not only meet current needs. Sometimes situations such as World Cups, the Olympics, Christmas, and New Year's, for example, are segmented situations that sometimes present behaviors that must be identified and analyzed in real time. In general, a combination of analyses types should be used to understand the present, the future, reasons and reactions on the part of the company, within legal and ethical aspects.

10. Skills

The report of the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2020) presents the technical and personal competencies in development and on the decline, highlighting self-management, team work, emotional intelligence and problem solving, Gramigna, (2004, p. 50), states that competencies can be routinely observed in three other blocks of indicators:

- <u>Knowledge (Know)</u>, which is related directly to academic training, complements provided by other sources of education and culture, as well as their self-development and learning within the organization.
- <u>Skills (Knowing How to Do)</u>, which is in the instrumental application of knowledge in an organized and planned way. In other words, transform in practice, with the due quality, the theoretical knowledge, and sometimes subjective, into actions that effectively, efficiently, and positively meet the different demands according to the expected results.
- <u>Attitudes (The Will to Do)</u>, associated with behavior, principles and human values that direct actions positively towards business objectives and goals.

Human and professional skills are shaped and stimulated by endogenous and exogenous factors, many originated from the external environment where the company and professional are inserted.

Research results:

The Focus Group method involved twenty participants, where problematization involved how Big Data influences the digital marketing of companies. As points to be highlighted, it is important, but not mandatory to have academic training in marketing or information technology, but rather how the professional can articulate the two major areas in the development of strategies based on the objectives and goals of the company. Academic training is important in the sense of technically knowing the tools in each area, however, the articulation of the strategies requires a group of talents, sometimes with heterogeneous profiles, aimed at consolidating the different knowledge and applications in the creation and development of unique strategic actions. Still under academic training, there was the perception that not all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), regardless of the course and except those that are focused on the digital environment and information technology, offer in their list of disciplines contents related to the subject; and should they offer them, they treat them as contents and not necessarily the applicability contextualized to the undergraduate course and market reality.

Another point is the participation of people with knowledge and skills in statistics and finance, so as to be able to collect, interpret and analyze market data and information. This research process involves competencies and especially skills as recent as professions like that of a data scientist, who through a broad and sometimes disruptive vision (ITO and HOWE, 2016), can identify latent opportunities as well as anticipate problems. Another convergent point is that academic and professional training should involve other areas of knowledge, such as International Relations and Social Sciences, because they contribute with different views of those of business areas and Administration as well.

This set of professionals, regardless of academic training and professional experience, requires the expansion of knowledge, updating and technical deepening, through the company as well as proactively. On the part of the company and within the their vision, the investment must be related to traditional means such as courses and training, however together with the participation of improvement programs and management training contextualized with the specific needs of its business. Within the career plan and within a personal perspective, each human talent must prepare, as an individual investment, to fully meet the challenges that the company, as well as its perspective of success in the labor market in general. Digital literacy is fundamental in identifying what tools are needed in each

situation and how they should be applied as strategies.

The experience curve deals with what was accomplished within the limitations of the resources of the company, contextualized with the business environment where it is inserted, and results obtained. More than a simple historical follow-up involving the rebate between revenues, costs and expenses, this curve should reflect the individual and group efforts of the professionals who carried out the actions; how they could be improved in the present, as well as, how the actions could be implemented in order to change the chain of events, which is one of the main premises of strategic planning. Or in other words, how to anticipate the changes and transformations of an exponential world in the sense of being, as a company, integrated into a future environment.

All interviewees believe that the use of digital media and networks by the company as means of communication is fundamental; however, all, once again, were forceful in affirming that digital transformation is still developing and evolving. They state that there are already consolidated metrics and indicators for traditional media, but digital media are still in experience. Nevertheless, being in the digital environment is a matter of survival, citing examples such as social media participation, engagement, and co-creation.

One concern discussed was the ethical issue. Srour (2003, p. 50) states that "*business decisions are not innocuous, anodyne or without consequences, they carry enormous irradiation power, by the effects they cause*". Big Data content comes from different forms and sources, and people are not always aware that they are authorized providers of data and information to third parties. Moreover, because it is a relatively new subject and from the discussions of authors such as Letouzé and Rotella. Within this context, we have the *Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados (LGPD)*, (General Law for Data Protection), of the President of the Republic (2018), which aims at regulating the application of these practices in private and public sectors.

Within the discussions that sought to be focused on the identified variables, when quoting the exponential world there was a parallel discussion as to how this reality is influencing the international area. Companies must meet internal demands, export the surplus and import what they need. The classic economic vision no longer applies in the exponential world, where companies look for more sustainable results by offering creative and innovative solutions to consumer problems. They are inserted in global, competitive, and disruptive environments, requiring differentiated solutions for each region and situation. In agribusiness, Big Data enables the monitoring of the market, and drones the behavior of the crops. Lands house sets of crops and cattle, where agricultural goods, protein and even wood are obtained, reducing the greenhouse effect, boosting productive resources, increasing profit and consumer perception. What was once scarce is now more productive. Agricultural technologies, for example, contribute to social technologies, as they result in economic and social benefit. Think of the global consumer, act outside the box in a resilient way and with the engagement of human talents.

As conclusions of the discussion, from the listed items, the interviewees concluded the need for long-term systemic thinking and strategic planning, considering the identification, development and monitoring of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies necessary for the business and inserted in the digital reality. This long-term view must be effectively contextualized with both short and medium terms, having Digital Analytics as one of the supports, inserted in the four types of data analysis: Predictive, Prescriptive, Descriptive and Diagnostic. The company should follow up and monitor through indicators the behavior and respective changes and market transformations, where companies should establish, within a transparent career plan known to all, means of repaying and rewarding the individual and group efforts of their organizational talents. According to the interviewees,

this complexity emphasizes the importance of strategic planning and monitoring the execution of macro and micro strategies, especially considering that the company must have the necessary resilience to identify in advance and overcome barriers and obstacles related to international business.

Many of the business experiences are part of the historical and strategic framework of organizations, having their dissemination either by journalistic communication vehicles or case studies directed to the academic environment, which, in a way, reduces the prospects of a more in-depth discussion on research and results on the subject.

11. Final Considerations

The world is undergoing frequent changes and transformations and businesses and people must be prepared for current and future challenges. These challenges can become barriers if there is no preparation nor opportunities for all those who have envisioned the future and prepared themselves for the changes and transformations at all levels. Information Technology (IT) has come from being simple tools for simplifying processes and reducing costs to a more active and important position in all economic sectors of society, since it directly influences consumers, their perceptions, their desires for products and services, as well as on the strategies of companies. In addition to consumers, we have all the Value System and respective stakeholders, including raw material suppliers and services, distributors and even the competitors.

There are still no perfect metrics for measuring the influence of technology on the business of the company, because in contrary to traditional marketing, off-line, which is a more long lived Experience Curve, the on-line is still being developed and with few experiences, if compared to the traditional. However, it is preponderant to understand that its presence and assertive use ensures the sustainability of any business. On the other hand, business strategies are developed by people who must have competencies and skills focused on contributing significantly to the success of the business where they develop their professional activities. In addition, because this is a relatively new and still evolving subject, several discussions should be held, such as whether people should be informed that they are providers of data and information to third parties, as well as the ethical aspects in this obtaining and even applying strategies by companies. The General Law for Data Protection (LGPD) is an advancement; however, its limits and practices are not always carried out. The important thing, as a final consideration, is the need for companies to have the necessary resilience to understand how the market works and how their actions should be developed within the digital environment together with the traditional.

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