

Article

Responding to Customer's Decision-making Intention in Pandemic Scenario: Indicators for Choosing the Right Marketing Automation Platform

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the marketing activities of companies in various industries and has had a dramatic impact on the global economy. Digital technologies played a vital role during the lockdown as they facilitated communication between organizations and customers. Channels for reaching customers and marketing communications are changing rapidly. Traditional buy-sell relationships between customers and companies are becoming more complex and must be understood in a more differentiated way. Supporting marketing activities by exploring digital technologies, this study is conducted to (1) provide insights into current marketing automation and customer decision-making intentions implemented by companies, and (2) identify the motivations, benefits, and challenges driving the adoption of digital marketing automation. A holistic MA model for choosing a MA solution complements the basic information and shows the selection procedure and the most important selection and evaluation indicators.

Keywords: Decision-making intention, Marketing automation platform, Customer, Pandemic scenario, Review paper

1. Introduction

Even more than the 11 September terrorist attacks or the 2008–2009 financial crisis, COVID-19 is reshaping the aviation industry vividly (Debnath et al., 2020; Trisakti, 2018). In specific, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the marketing activities of companies in various industries and the global economy. A large number of airline workers have been forced to quit their jobs with little prospect of the pandemic's end as governmental bailouts run out or were insufficient. In addition, air cargo demand, passenger traffic, airport workforce, and incoming revenues in the global aviation industry are expected not to return to their pre-epidemic level until 2024, which is one more year later than previously expected (IATA, 2020).

As the epidemic continues, countries have closed customs, so Taiwan's airlines only provide limited services. From the 2020 summer, the "Pretend to Go Abroad" tour is the most popular travel package of many Taiwanese airlines. This allows participants a chance to better experience the feeling of traveling abroad without the risk of being infected by COVID-19. However, employees are under great work and psychological pressure as they still face dismissals or unpaid leaves and may be unemployed. Digital technologies play a vital role during the lockdown as they facilitate communication between organizations and customers. Channels for reaching customers and marketing communications are changing rapidly, and marketing engineering - the ability to achieve rapid amid complex digital transformation - becomes a new challenge. Marketing plays a leading role in digital transformation. Traditional communication is completely outdated, thus giving way to dynamic real-time communications. The Internet of Things (IoT) has opened many new data sources, communication channels, and environments. Mobile marketing no longer includes mobile optimization measures only, but now includes the use of location-based and contextual services. Traditional buy-sell relationships between customers and companies are becoming more complex and must be understood differently. Hence, this research is carried out to understand how to use a suitable marketing plan (i.e. internal and external environment) to better assist the aviation industry with the successful revival during the post-epidemic era.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Marketing Automation

Nowadays, companies use business intelligence (BI) solutions to gain a clearer picture of internal operations, customers, supply chain, and financial performance. They also derive a significant return on investment (ROI) by using BI for better tactics and plans, responding more effectively to emergencies, and capitalizing more quickly on new opportunities. In short, they use BI to become intelligent in doing business.” (Eckerson, 2003) In the changing environment, marketers in aviation already face several challenges, and how to build a stronger interface between marketing and other functions such as sales, innovation, and finance is considered important. Now, most companies are facing a severe challenge: how to consider the travel boom and safety concerns of the community and still maintain customers in the Post- COVID-19 crisis. Marketing automation, therefore, is required for interactive marketing for internal/external customers in addition to automated processes. In the post-epidemic era, marketing automation is considered relatively suitable, for social distancing has reduced consumer confidence and increased the work pressure on employees in the aviation industry. Thus, marketing automation needs to be implemented through the internal and external environment of the aviation industry before the situation returns to that at the pre-Covid levels. Marketing automation utilizes multiple data sources to design communication on the fly in real-time for communication methods (e.g., website, email, smartphone app, and others) (Kim et al., 2003). As a result, internal and/or external customers are enabled to show more engagement due to the enhanced relevance of the information and pay more attention to brand communication (Dijkstra, 2008). Therefore, companies that reuse marketing automation may enhance their relationship with customers (Todor, 2016).

2.2. Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is an important factor to motivate passengers to continue using airline services, which also influences the degree of competition. Therefore, airline market shares heavily rely on the airlines’ ability to cultivate and maintain customer loyalty, thereby leading to reliable profits (Chang and Hung, 2013). Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on airline service users, the situation is likely to recover shortly (Ahmed, Quadeer, and McKay, 2020). By that time, the factor of loyalty becomes the most significant and major concern to stakeholders. However, based on the results derived from the available studies, little attention has been paid to how to comprehensively evaluate the factor, and the link between commitment, competitor attractiveness, and passenger loyalty in the airline industry has been neglected. The closure of the country has led to the reduction of international flights during the epidemic. Thus, how maintaining customer loyalty and their intention of decision-making is important. Therefore, the behavior of airline passengers is important to understand their needs and concerns in selecting airline service. To study these issues, the following marketing automation features are selected.

- (1) Efficiency in implementing marketing automation
- (2) The comparison between offer and demand for the design of a marketing decision support system
- (3) Differences between development systems for end-user systems and marketing decision support systems and their effect on the nature and characteristics of an implementation process

In consumer research, perceived risk theory is based on the fact that consumers perceive risk in their decision-making behaviors as uncertainty can potentially lead to negative consequences. Perceived risk is derived from unanticipated and uncertain consequences of an unpleasant nature associated with the purchase of a product (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). Conceptually, perceived risk is closely linked with perceived uncertainty. In previous research, both concepts are considered to have the same construct. Perceived risk is defined as consumers’ subjective perception of uncertainty (Rather, 2021). For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has made tourists feel high health risks when visiting destinations or hospitality facilities in the long run.

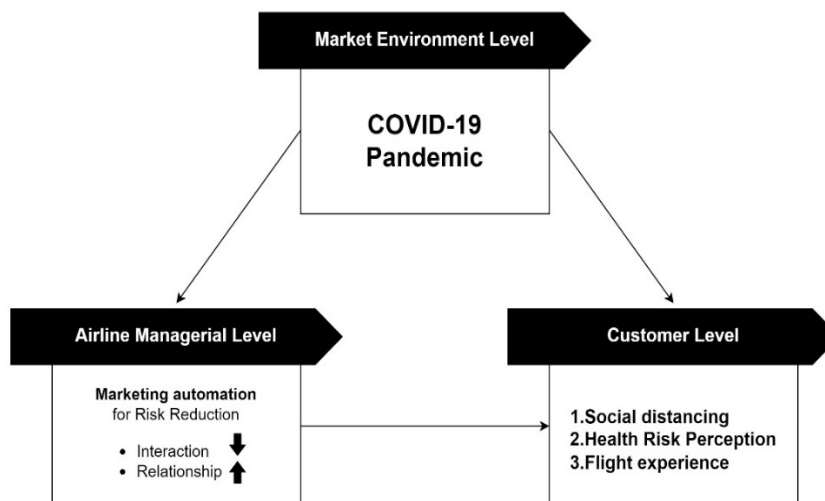


Fig. 1. View of the market environment in the aviation industry.

As mentioned earlier, uncertainty is the cause of perceived risk. Therefore, a key aspect of health risk management is understanding how to successfully reduce uncertainty. Considering the finding in the first year, this research expands the significance and contribution of the perceived risk to the second year of the pandemic to investigate whether the combination of marketing automation into the marketing strategy can increase the confidence of customers in their selection of aviation industry (Fig. 1). Better incentives for satisfied customers who share their experiences is an essential strategy (Kostyra et al., 2016), and customers are encouraged to do so. By using marketing automation, an organization improves the skills of its employees to secure customer engagement and improve their contacts with customers significantly.

3. Data Collection and Methodology

3.1. Research Framework

The process of the subsequent development of the conceptual model is examined to have empirical evidence and better understand the marketing automation and the relationship between the organization and customers in it (Fig. 2). The key focus is shown in a dotted box in Fig. 2 to emphasize the research purpose.

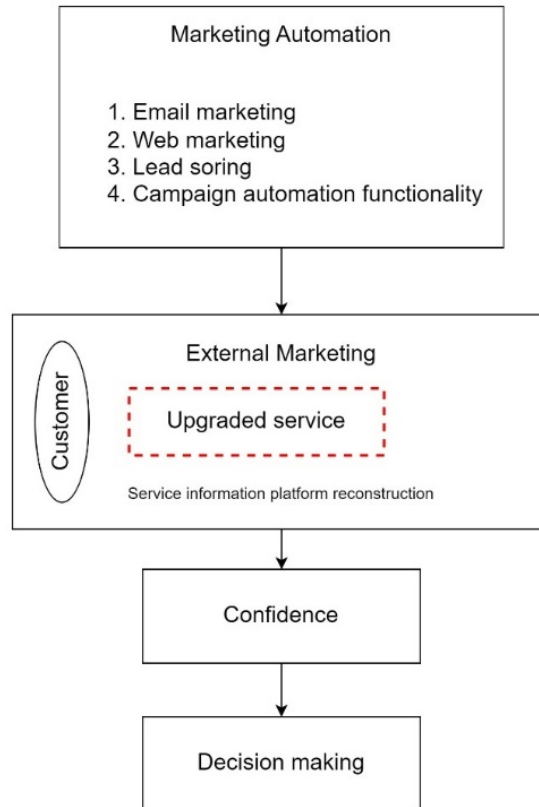


Fig. 2. Research framework.

For the literature review, “Web of Science” was used to search research works related to marketing automation during 2015–2022. A total of 1143 results were collected, and duplicates were removed (see Figure 3 & 4). Also, studies in the business and/or management were excluded, too. As a result, 298 articles were selected to present the evaluation of marketing automation.

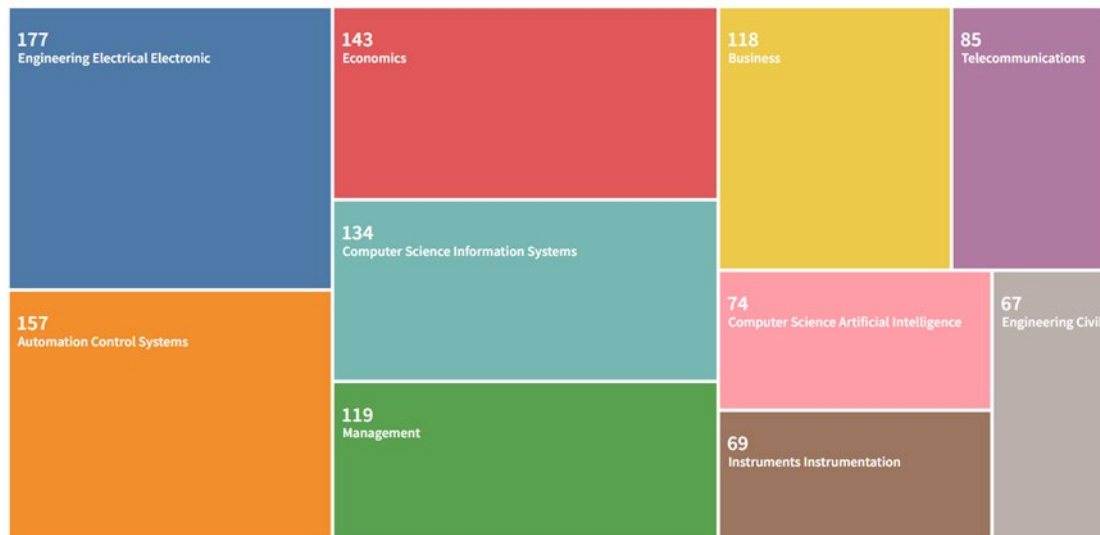


Fig. 3. First-round result from the Web of Science database.

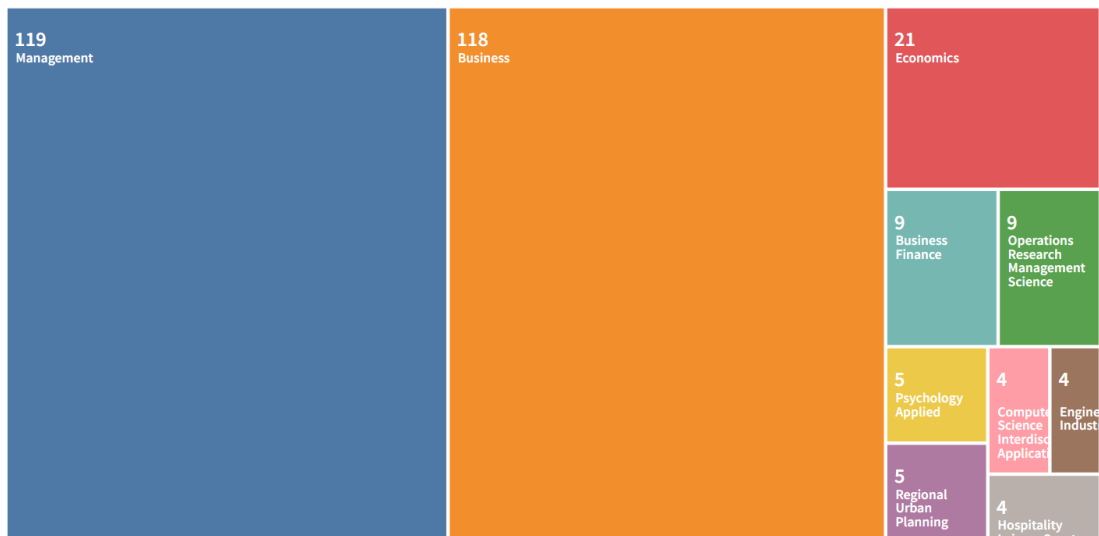


Fig. 4. Final-round result from the Web of Science database.

3.2. Findings from Literature Review

The choice of a marketing automation platform requires a basic understanding of it. Marketing executives need to ensure that marketing automation brings value to their marketing processes. To this end, the results obtained from the literature review included the definition, characteristics, and advantages and disadvantages of marketing automation. Many people often are confused about the similarities and differences between digital marketing, online marketing, and traditional marketing. Traditional marketing includes techniques such as print advertising and radio and is proved to be successful in the past because it could reach customers on a larger scale. Digital marketing includes all forms of marketing that require diverse electronic equipment, of which online marketing is a subset (Peter et al., 2021). Online shopping and e-commerce have appeared amid the rise of digital marketing. In the 21st century, most companies have established online businesses. In particular, the epidemic has accelerated and affected digitalization and online demand. Analytics provides information on how to provide real-time insights on prospect behavior and related statistics, demographics, and interests.

The customer journey is the process in which a visual representation of a customer's interaction with a company is displayed to achieve a goal (Fig. 5). A linear journey from point A to B is hardly seen as buyers typically go through a back-and-forth and/or multi-channel journey, which makes it hard to be visualized. Creating fit-for-purpose procedures for the company helps its employees align products with customer needs and keep the company operating properly. It provides a better understanding of the concerns and needs of potential clients who directly motivate or inhibit their behavior. This information enables companies to enhance the customer experience, thereby resulting in higher conversion rates and better customer retention.

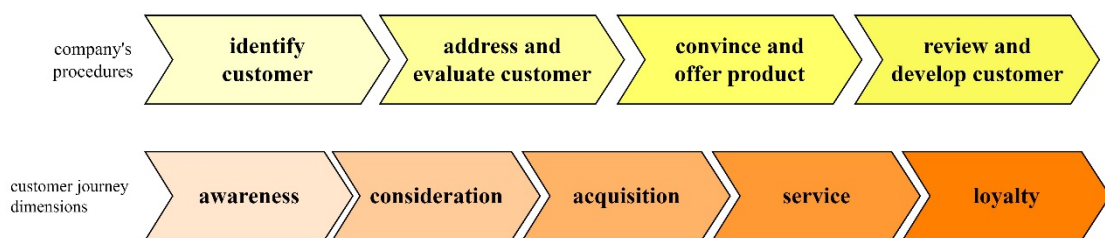


Fig. 5. Customer journey.

The term “marketing automation” was first coined by John D.C. Little to support automated marketing decisions on the Internet (Little, 2001; Bucklin et al., 1998, 2002). As there are many ways in which a concept can be developed and used, it is always tailored to meet the needs of a company. The benefits of marketing automation are numerous. According to the evidence revealed by the previous research, this concept generates high-quality results through behavioral targeting and content personalization, thereby leading to increased sales and efficiency (Buehrer et al., 2005; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Automation has a positive impact on

the efficiency of marketing communications, which ultimately supports companies throughout the customer lifecycle process (Senecal et al., 2007; Pol, 2020).

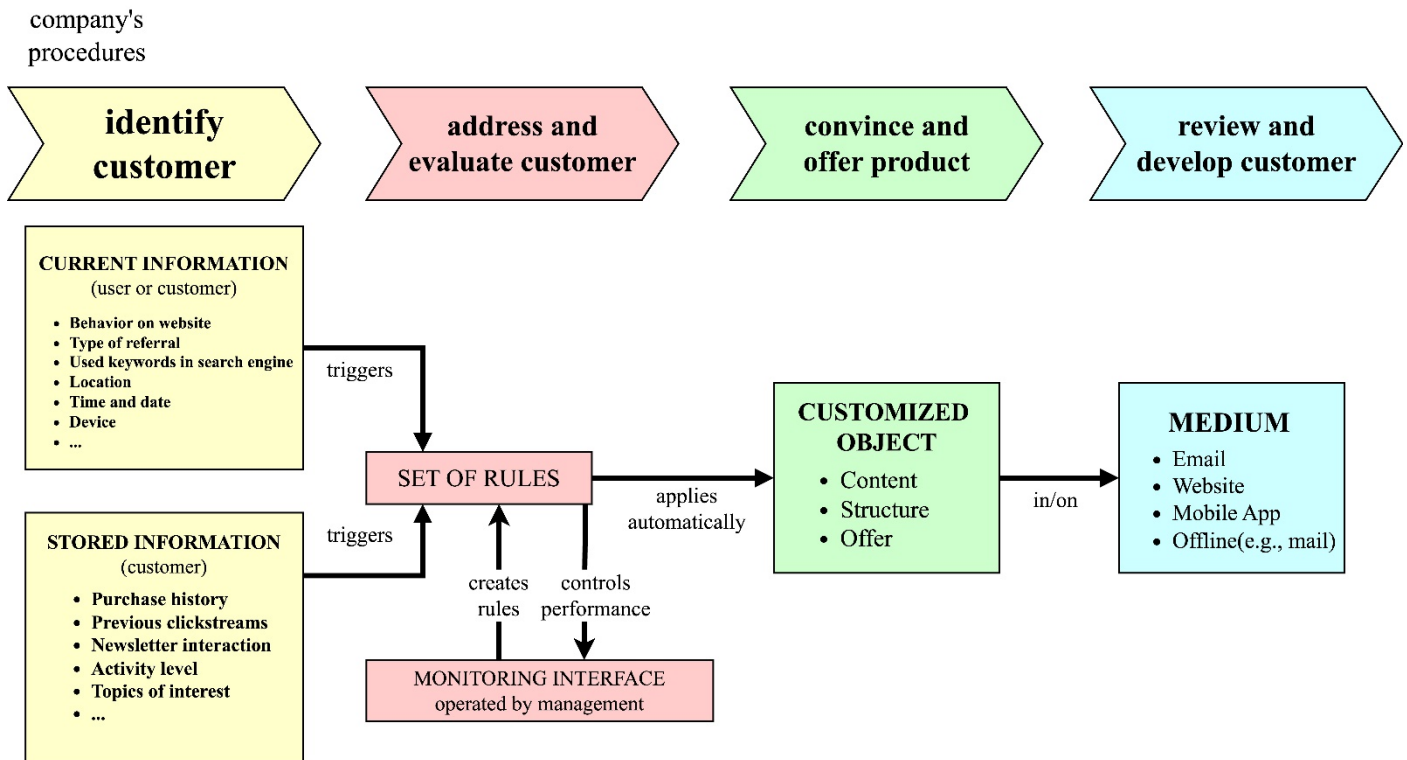


Fig. 6. Process of marketing automation.

The setup process for marketing automation is time-consuming and expensive. Several authors believe that in the long run, companies can induce huge advantages, for they can save money, reduce human resource requirements, and optimize investment, which in turn helps companies grow (do Nascimento and da Silva, 2017; Wamba-Taguimdje et al., 2020). Marketing automation depends on data analytics to derive achievable goals, define a set of automated actions, implement them, and measure the results. The data involved in marketing automation comes from the stored information as well as tracked user journey and clickstream data. The availability of data is a key condition for marketing automation to analyze user data and behavior to initiate predefined marketing actions. Once the rules are organized and established, marketers can benefit from automation. This is because it executes actions for thousands of events. Fig. 6 shows the general framework of marketing automation from the initial data collection and analysis to the final automated marketing campaigns through various mediums (Heimbach et al., 2015).

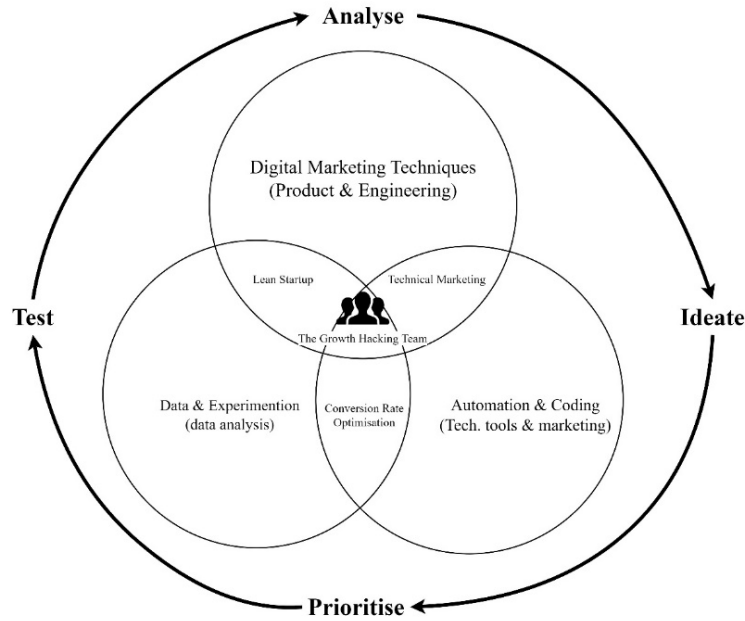


Fig. 7. Process of growth hacking.

Digital transformation brings opportunities and challenges, which need a growth hacking to reduce costs and time associated with marketing for using growth hacks, increase competitiveness, and strengthen customer relationships (Peter and Vecchia, 2021, see Figure 7). This puts pressure on companies when it comes to the adjustment made to those operations through which customer demand can be met to better keep pace with the competition as such (Said et al., 2015). To better distinguish growth hacking from traditional marketing, it can be used to improve personalized marketing and help companies grow (Ellis and Brown, 2020), as a mindset and process through which companies can grow quickly with limited marketing budgets (Young, 2020). Stronger relationships with customers can be fostered and sustained by marketing automation (Olomu, 2019).

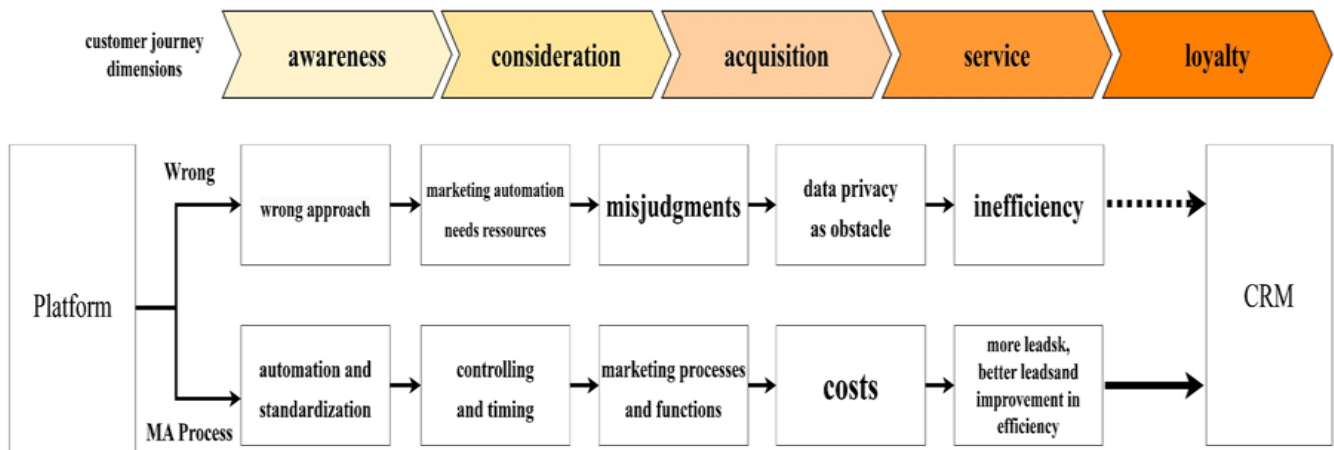


Fig. 8. Chances and risks of customer journey.

A marketing automation solution is a collection of multiple functions interacting with each other as a platform (Peter and Vecchia, 2021). Many new features are proposed to accommodate the fast-paced environment. Arguably, if the purpose is to support business needs, investing time, energy, and money in marketing automation needs a sound decision to create opportunities (Wamba-Taguimdje et al., 2020). Meanwhile, chances and risks better help understand the underlying factors to avoid making mistakes or putting unrealistic expectations in this regard. Additionally, the following changes (the right process in Fig. 8) and risks (the left process in Fig. 8) typically represent their impact over time. Therefore, the choice of a marketing automation platform must be considered for a long-term investment.

4. Conclusions

As indicated by this research, marketing automation is a positive link with company growth to contact customers. It is an effective tool at different stages of the procurement process that can be systematically managed. Providing a framework and a direction for choosing a marketing automation solution, the quality of service and solutions of the provider needs to be the relevant indicators for further selection for technical aspects of the process for marketing automation.

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