

A Literature Review on Digital Marketing: The Evolution of a Revolution

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ABSTRACT

This literature review aims at providing a comprehensive and consolidated representation on how Digital Transformation in Marketing has, so far, influenced value making for businesses and discuss prospective ways ahead. In particular, current key concepts that need to be redefined have been spotted, as well as challenges in the digital marketing sector that need to be tackled with regards, especially, to social media and mobile marketing. A new structured approach is proposed on how businesses can stay up to date, exploiting the advantages, while minimizing the effects of disadvantages, of an almost inescapable decision to adopt, develop and implement a Digital Marketing Strategy. Future in marketing seems to embrace augmented and virtual reality as it's natural progression, therefore, technology along with development and adoption of specific organizational capabilities and management tools respectively, integration of robust business processes, such as effective media derived data conversion and resource transformation exchange, and certainly, acquisition of invaluable human expertise, provide a solid basis for businesses to stay competitive in a fast changing and challenging marketplace. A systematic, five-step research method process for literature review has been used, taking into consideration article publication year 2020 onwards, from credible academic database sources.

1. Introduction

It is rather uncontested that for the last 20 years, marketing has seen a shift in what is known as 'the Digital Transformation' of marketing, widely accepted and investigated by both practitioners and academics. Digital advertisements, e-commerce, mobile services, just to name a few technologies, have led to a revolution in how to interact with and provide products and services to consumers (Li et al., 2021).

However, due to the ever-changing nature of digital ecosystem, it is imperative that businesses keep up to date through evolutionary approaches in the way they attract, interact, connect,

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network and integrate consumers by means of a Digital Marketing Strategy (Unvan & Badlo, 2021).

COVID-19 Pandemic acted as an enabler by pushing people in the direction of adopting social media and other web applications for their entertainment, socialization, shopping and keeping up with the news, amongst other activities. Taking a concrete look at marketing, pandemic has put an emphasis on social media and mobile marketing (Mason et al., 2021). Numbers are indisputable: More than half of global population, around four billion people, are active social media users and almost all of them, 98.8 %, accessing social media platforms via mobile devices (Table 1). Those marketers who've used social media for one year or longer reported substantially better results driving traffic vs. those with less experience. However, offline purchase intentions still surpassing online ones (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2021; Patil et al., 2021; Statista 2022).

Table 1.
Useful Data Analytics on Digital Marketing

Fact	% OR Absolute Number
Average Time an Individual Spends on SNSs	2 h & 2min/day
Considerations on ethical implications prior to invest on AI	25 % out of 250 companies
Feel comfortable receiving personalized marketing messages generated by automation tools, surprising them & helping make purchasing decisions	57% of surveyed consumers
Searches undertaken on Google actioned by voice	20%
Total number of active social media users	4.20 billion
Annual change (2020-2021) in the number of global social media users	+13.2 %
Total number of social media users accessing via mobile phones	4.15 billion
Most used Ad platform by marketers is Facebook	75%
Most used Social Media Platforms in U.S by businesses are Facebook, Twitter & LinkedIn	93%
B2B marketers are using more LinkedIn ads than Facebook vs B2C	39% vs. 21%
B2C marketers are more likely to use Facebook ads vs B2B	79% vs. 70%
Marketers plan on increasing their LinkedIn organic activities over the next 12 months	54%
Marketers plan on increasing their YouTube organic activities over the next 12 months	62%
Marketers plan on increasing their Instagram organic activities over the next 12 months	64%
New social media marketers mostly focus on Facebook & Instagram	86% & 68 %
Number of Marketers using social media marketing for 1 year or longer & report generating exposure for their businesses	83 %
Those who've used social media for 1 year or longer reported substantially better results driving traffic vs. those with less experience	72%+ reported benefits

Sources: Statista, 2022, Li et al., 2021, Mason et al., 2021, 2021 Social Media Marketing Industry Rep.

The perpetual objective of marketing activity is the establishment of a healthy relationship between businesses and customers, leading to value creation for both sides. In doing so, it is necessary to focus on the right market segment, understand needs and expectations and emphasize on creating a loyal base of customers. All of the above remain valid in the digital marketing sector, introducing certain distinct characteristics and requirements (Wibowo et al., 2021). Digital marketing tools may include, not exhaustively, social media, mobile applications, Internet advertising, viral content, contextual advertising, targeted ads, native advertising, and content marketing (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Wibowo et al., 2021).

Mobile marketing is considered to be one of the most important digital marketing channels; its advantages include broad, fast, cheap, and easy access of consumers to products and services, with the possibility of completion of buying and selling processes almost anywhere and at any time. On the businesses side, mobile marketing consists of a sum of practices that allow them to communicate and interact with consumers, in a lively and vibrant way, affecting consumers' decisions to buy (Babu & Ramamoortthy, 2020; Dwivedi, et al., 2021; Madan, 2021; Nabieva, 2021).

Social media marketing is the use of social media platforms and websites to promote products and/or services. Social media changed drastically the relationship between product/services providers and consumers. Nowadays, social media are used as a main source of product/service information by consumers who are spending a lot of every day's time on them, as they have become a primary communication and socialization channel, especially for the youth. Users of social media feel empowered, having increased opportunities of online participation, with the benefits of convenience, self-organization, self-education, richness of information, alternative options, reduced cost and time, which are much appreciated (Babu & Ramamoortthy, 2020; Dubbelink et al., 2021; Labrovic et al., 2021).

For businesses, establishing brand presence on social media, and especially on Social Networking Sites (SNSs), gives them the opportunity, among other things, to augment customer engagement through interactions beyond purchase, including generation of new ideas by customers, accumulation of learning with regards to customers' preferences and other characteristics, exploiting positive Word of Mouth (WoM) and buzz marketing. For a business, gaining competitive advantage through this particular digital channel, means increased brand awareness and improved brand image, which leads to enhanced brand loyalty which, in turn, makes overall marketing strategy more effective and efficient (Babu & Ramamoortthy, 2020).

Integration of Digital Marketing Strategy within the overall Marketing Strategy of an enterprise seems to be an inevitable organizational solution for sustainable and prosperous business outcomes (Malesev & Cherry, 2021; Santos & Pinto-e-Silva, 2021; Tairova, 2021).

The objectives of the present review are:

- To examine the prevailing key-concepts in digital marketing sector,
- To illustrate current and future challenges in digital marketing sector,
- To evaluate key-concepts and challenges related to digital marketing sector and propose a new structured approach as a strategic marketing planning and decision tool for businesses.

2. Material and Methods

A 5-Step procedure to review related articles from contemporary literature, year 2020 onwards, was followed, using credible academic databases, see Table 2.

Table 2.

A Five – Step Research Method Process for Literature Review

PROCESS	SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS	
STEPS	STEP DEFINITION	STEP ELABORATION
STEP 1	Research criteria clarification	Only relevant sources taken into consideration
STEP 2	Literature search	Scopus, Semantic Scholar, Research Gate, Google Scholar, Academia.edu databases were searched
STEP 3	Literature filtering	Manual screening of relevant articles
STEP 4	Selected articles analysis	Content evaluation and selection
STEP 5	Illustration of key research results and implications	Data analytics and statistical representation

Adopted from Tornjanski, V., et al., EBT 2021.

3. Results

Apart from numbers and figures, that are undoubtedly illuminating, within the scope of this review was to examine some Key Concepts, that have to be meticulously defined or even redefined, in order to remain valid in the new digital era, and accordingly, be treated consistently from relevant stakeholders. Therefore, we ended up with the following ones (Table 3), providing a suggested mainstream Definition for each one of the Concepts, after thorough study of current definitions found in literature. Apart from the proposed mainstream Definitions, we also provide some useful insights for each individual concept.

Table 3.

A Summary of Key Concepts in Digital Marketing sector and their suggested definition

Key Concept	Mainstream Definition	Source
<i>Digital Marketing Strategy</i>	The business strategy that embraced with regards to targeted & interactive marketing of products & services that uses digital technology to attract leads and retain them as consumers. Main objectives of such a Strategy are: brand promotion, sales growth, connectedness & collaboration, listening & learning, empower & engage consumers.	<i>Adopted from</i> Li et al., 2021; Tairova et al., 2021
<i>Social Media Marketing Strategy</i>	An organization's integrated pattern of activities that, based on a careful assessment of customer's motivations for brand-related social media use and the undertaking of deliberate engagement initiatives, transform social media connectedness (networks) and interactions (influences) into valuable strategic means to achieve desirable marketing outcomes.	<i>Adopted from</i> Mason et al., 2021; Wibowo et al., 2021
<i>Mobile Marketing</i>	Using the mobile phone as a means of conveying commercial content to customers.	<i>Adopted from</i> Dwivedi et al., 2021
<i>Business Resource Transformation</i>	A holistic approach in how to assess, analyze, acquire, leverage, deploy, use, exploit and evaluate resources (either tangible or intangible) in the interest of a successful digital marketing strategy for value creation.	<i>Adopted from</i> Dwivedi et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021
<i>Business-Customer-Customer Triangle</i>	Mixed business models that combine business-to-business, business-to-customer and customer-to-customer interactions.	<i>Adopted from</i> Yosep et al., 2021
<i>Consumer/Customer Experience & Customer journey in Digital era</i>	Digital communication technologies can have transformational impact on how consumers/customers interact with brands, not only on purely transactional basis, but also as co-creators, advocates of their experiences, or as empowered agents seeking to collaborate. Main characteristics are: the capability of highly personalized communications & extended involvement which can possibly produce sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral & social responses to the enterprise's products & services, that, in turn, enhance attraction, motivation & acknowledgement that, ultimately, leads to added value during the customer's buying journey.	<i>Adopted from</i> Li et al., 2021; Wibowo et al., 2021
<i>Customer Engagement Behaviors (CEBs)</i>	Customers' motivations resulting from different attitudes and attachments that can influence their behaviors towards an organization's offerings and/or activities & inevitably influence SMMS's outcomes, beyond transactions alone.	<i>Adopted from</i> Li et al., 2021

<i>Customer Loyalty Intention</i>	Customer willingness to be a loyal & committed customer.	<i>Adopted from</i> Wibowo et al., 2021
<i>Customer Trust & Satisfaction</i>	Two distinct, yet related, components of business-customer relationship quality. Trust and satisfaction in an intangible, virtual environment as prerequisites for business success.	<i>Adopted from</i> Wibowo et al., 2021
<i>Consumer well-being</i>	The quality of life of consumers as a result of their interactions, interfaces and experiences with product/services providers.	<i>Adopted from</i> Erlangga et al., 2021
<i>Social Media Brand Communities</i>	Virtual communities which provide opportunities of simplification on the decision-making process on behalf of consumers/customers. They exert direct impact on brand awareness, associations & loyalty, as well as on perceived quality of product/services.	<i>Adopted from</i> Erlangga et al., 2021
<i>Innovation & Collaboration</i>	Exploiting Web.2 technologies, businesses can create online communities with consumers, with the purpose of keeping being engaged with them and other consumers who are also social media users. Customers, as active collaborators, can generate new ideas within online brand communities through the opportunities that digital technologies offer to them. Companies can build on that and use AI powered websites, chatbots etc., to enhance shopping experience and make genuine product recommendations.	<i>Adopted from</i> Ljubisavljević et al., 2021

Some useful insights with regards to the aforementioned Definitions include the following:

- *Digital Marketing Strategy and Business Resource Transformation*. Evidently no one, either at individual or organizational level, can proceed with a transformation of any kind without changing its mindset, allocate properly available resources and find ways of doing things both effectively and efficiently (Nabieva, 2021).
- The triangle of *Business-Customer-Customer*, in the forms of B2B, B2C and C2C is gaining more and more importance in the digital era (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021).
- *Customer Engagement Behaviors (CEBs)* are already at the epicenter of marketers' attention due to their impact on brand loyalty and subsequent purchase intention in the digital environment (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021).
- *Consumer/Customer Experience and Customer journey* need to be treated with diligence by marketers, especially with the advent of augmented and virtual reality (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Tornjanski et al., 2021).
- *Customer Trust and Satisfaction* retain their value within the digital marketing sector. Trust, in essence, the authentic engagement, and satisfaction, a measurement of perceived customers' happiness about provided products/services/experiences, are significant predictors of customer loyalty intention, and can offer valuable information on customers' distinctive preferences (Tairova et al., 2021; Tornjanski et al., 2021; Vrabie, K., 2021).
- *Customer Loyalty Intention* was, is and will be the Holy Grail for marketers; how best can be leveraged to produce value for the business remains a key concept that needs to be approached and developed quite differently in the digital era. Building a loyal fan base seems to be an advantage that getting stronger and stronger as relevant stakeholders, such as marketers, gain more years of experience (Zecevic et al., 2021).

- *Consumer well-being* goes beyond purely traditional transactional relationship between stakeholders and creates new needs for consumers' and obligations for businesses, respectively. Through authentic interactions, consumers invest emotionally and financially in brands, feeling that they make the right decisions, based on well – acquired information. In this way, brands help consumers gain knowledge and understanding, have great experiences and, overall, improve their quality of life and well-being (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Madan, 2021).
- *Social Media Brand Communities* are here to offer a new reality of socialization with great potential of creating empowered customers and valued brands. The role of celebrities-bloggers-crowd funding must be thoroughly studied. Particularly Social Network Sites brand communities, help establishing business social presence exploiting Web 2.0 and user-generated content, providing opportunities for self-presentation and self-disclosure and promoting focus on specific topic creation (Erlangga et al., 2021; Slaletic et al., 2021).
- *Digital Content Marketing, and Digital Story Telling* are powerful tools in the hands of capable marketers to leverage and create added value. Social Media marketing content has to evoke feelings of happiness, excitement and entertainment to customers, while giving the opportunity of interaction through two-way direct communication between product/service provider and customer. Must be current, comprehensive, clear and neat, in order to be easily explored by customers. At its best, content should challenge customers to share it and make it viral or contribute to positive WoM, while offering sensual satisfaction and emotional stimulation, for a positive customer experience to be realized. Research has shown that the quality of content is of major importance to Millennials (Yosep et al., 2021).
- *Content Crisis* is a term that is used to sum up major challenges relating to social content strategy. This strategy may include issues concerning content popularity and virality related to social message nature, content-user fit-vividness-interactivity etc., customer co-creation implications, use of social influencers and highly connected people, use of right automation tools to handle popularity impact, analysis of contextual factors, product characteristics, organizational processes and resources, ethical implications of message virality, etc., that may affect overall digital content marketing strategy (Erlangga et al., 2021; Yosep et al., 2021).
- *Innovation and Collaboration*. Some concepts remain relevant no matter what. Creativity and its subsequent innovation are much needed along with collaboration between plethora of stakeholders, to achieve a positive sign in value making. Customers, as co-creators, give valuable input but social networking impression management emerges as a necessary marketing process in order to enhance the value people realize, promoting collective health & welfare of social bodies focused on brands (Hayes, 2022; Ljubisavljevic et al., 2021).

4. Discussion

Digital revolution, and its following evolution, did not come without disadvantages that better be comprehended and treated as challenges. *Table 4* provides a consolidated summary of major challenges that digital marketing sector must face, either being a big or small business, an experienced or novice marketer, a research scholar or an academic one who has interest on the subject.

Table 4.
Consolidated View of Challenges in Digital Marketing Sector

Digital Marketing Domains	Main Contemporary Challenges	What should we focus on
Social Media/ Augmented/Virtual/ Mixed Reality Domains	Ethical Dilemmas	Robust Professional Ethics Policies & Procedures, Assurance of data credibility so AI learning is based on right patterns, Fruitful combination of AR/VR/MR with existing marketing approaches
All Domains	Technological Issues – Digital Divide	Solutions have to be found in relation to Internet, computer & phone access, information technology literacy, costs, connectivity Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
Social Media Domain	Virality/Social Influence Contagion/e-WOM/Buzz Marketing	Best use of Opinion Leaders as Brand Advocates, Open & Transparent communication channels between B2B, B2C, C2C, Best use of Online Customer Reviews (OCRs), Assurance of source credibility, Considerations on real-time implications & multidimensionality of constructs
All domains	Research Provocations	Interdisciplinary field, Diversity of Research Questions, Existence of Validated Scales, Construct Definition, Wide range of Theories & Research Methods, Specification of practice vs. speed of Research, Integration of AR-VR-MR
All domains	Market Segmentation	Which market segments are more influenced, Which are the proper ways of dealing with them,
All domains	Personalization/Personaliza tion-Privacy Paradox/Marketing Comfort	Robust Information Security Policies & Procedures, Compliance with existing regulations, Leveraging the acquisition of personalized content in a way that does not create second thoughts on behalf of consumers, Micro-targeting under scrutiny, Marketing Strategies to support & mitigate consumers’ concerns regarding trust in digital practices
All Domains	Regulation of Digital Marketing	All relevant stakeholders must work together to come up with valid, relevant, ethical, practical solutions
All Domains All Domains	Metrics/Micro-targeting Communication Incitements	Developing right metrics Effective-Ethical-Appropriate
All Domains	Data driven vs. User oriented Behavior	Is there a best approach or the decision is contextual & situational based? Advantages & disadvantages of each approach, Functional Brand Image vs. Hedonic Brand Image
All Domains	Corporate Citizenship	Micro-processes of individual consumers interactions vs. macro-level cultural discourses
All Domains	Integration of online & offline Marketing Strategies	Detailed study of consumers’ preferences, attitudes, beliefs, Acquisition of Big Data, Holistic approach to business marketing strategy

Source: Gupta, N., (2020)

Having collected current and future challenges, as well as main key concepts that have to be properly define or even redefine, we propose a new structured approach for businesses in order to be used as a strategic marketing planning and decision tool. Figure 1, depicts schematically the process that a business may follow in order to create an environment of success, walking the road of Digital Marketing, while considering the aforementioned key concepts, challenges and their relative importance.

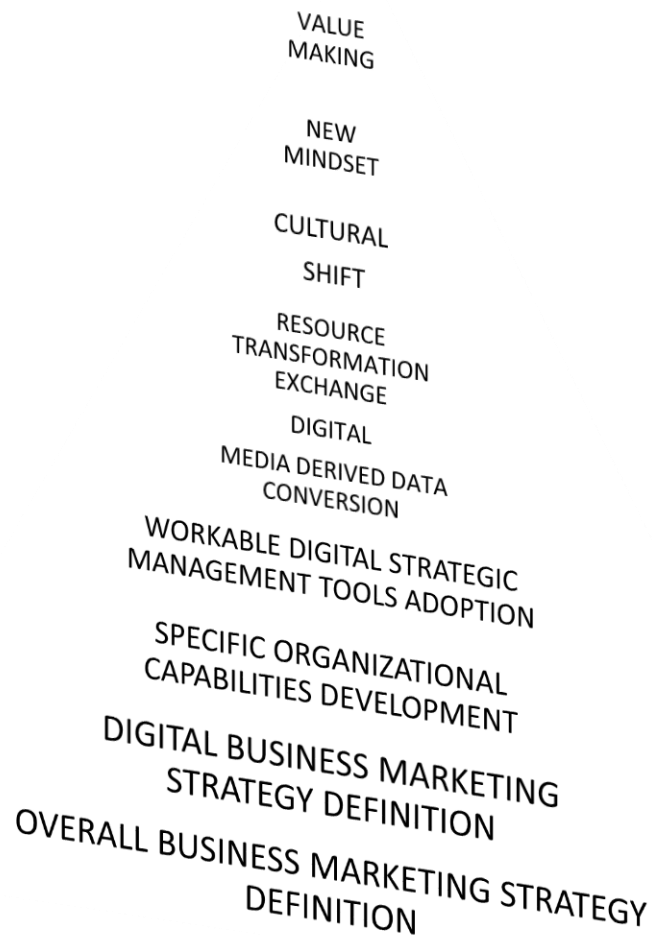


Figure 1. Digital Marketing Strategy: A 9-STEP Business Realization Pyramid Example

At the base of the pyramid model lies the overall marketing strategy definition, with clear scope and targets definition, along with allocated responsibilities and resources. Within the overall marketing strategy, digital marketing strategy definition is of paramount importance because relevant decisions must be made on the basis of this exact strategy orientation (Li et al., 2021).

At the top of the pyramid model lies value making, for both businesses and customers, which can be achieved by embracing a new mindset with regards to employee engagement and intelligence, operational excellence, organizational structure, reengineering of business processes, and customer co-creation. This is feasible only after a shift in company's culture has been also achieved, with the adoption of new tools, development of innovative resource allocation and acquisition of specific organizational capabilities. We advocate that a business can start its turn to digital marketing by leveraging, firstly, its technical aspects, with softer

elements coming up next in sequence (Santos & Pinto-e-Silva, 2021; Tairova, M.M., et al., 2021). Digitalization (digital transformation) should take place in congruence with resource transformation and knowledge management otherwise, research and real examples, have shown that the process has failed whenever a traditional organization attempts the next step (Madan, 2021; Yosep, M.A., et al., 2021).

After the first complete realization of all the steps, the pyramid can transform into a spiral with feedback loops that energize each succeeding step after the first one that has been used as the starting point.

5. Conclusions

Digital Marketing Strategy represents the approach businesses embrace on how they want to be seen and accordingly, treated by other business partners, consumers and customers, in the new digital era. With the advent of Web.2 and the transformation it brought in the way of communication and interaction between relevant parties, mobile marketing and social media marketing have emerged as key players in creating value for businesses, the first one mainly as an effective tool of accessing offered services/products anywhere at any time, and the second one as a consumer critical decision-making tool (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Tairova et al., 2021).

The evolution of Digital Marketing sector, within Marketing ecosystem, is a continuous process and demands commitment in meeting or even transcending consumer expectations, by offering purposeful experiences which promote healthy behaviors on customers' behalf, leading to value creation for them and for businesses. Pandemic showed to marketers that in order to stay in the game they have to use mobile technologies and social media as important enablers of gaining brand equity, awareness, image, sales promotion, enhanced trust and loyalty intention as well as post-purchase satisfaction (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021; Wibowo et al., 2021).

In order to deliver value to customers in a sustainable way, and gain a firm position in the marketplace, businesses should adopt a new mindset and cooperate with various stakeholders. By leveraging advances in data science and technology, they can effectively use massive amounts of diverse consumer data, exploiting data analytics technology, and predict accurately consumers' changing preferences in order to become market-adaptable by formulating appropriate digital marketing and overall marketing strategies (Yosep et al., 2021).

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