

Digital Marketing Strategies and Consumer Engagement: A Systematic Review of Emerging Trends, Technologies, and Measurement Frameworks

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ABSTRACT

The fast growth of digital technologies has changed the environment of marketing radically, as the use of the conventional methods does not seem adequate to address and attract the modern consumer. In the given paper, an extensive systematic review of digital marketing, including social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, influencer marketing, programmatic advertising, and data-driven personalization, is provided. Based on 87 peer-reviewed articles that were released within the 2018-2024 timeframe, this review brings together empirical evidence on the usefulness of every strategy in motivating consumer engagement, brand awareness, lead generation, and conversion rates. The results indicate that multichannel strategies always work better than one channel campaigns and personalization and artificial intelligence (AI)-driven products become essential instruments of marketing ROI. Also, the research reveals serious gaps in measurement systems, especially when it comes to long-term brand equity measures in the digital context. An updated Digital Marketing Effectiveness Framework (DMEF) is suggested to inform practitioners and a next-generation of study. Discussions on implications to marketing managers, policy makers as well as academics are observed with recommendations of ethical use of data and emerging measures of regulation.

Keywords: digital marketing; consumer engagement; social media; SEO; content marketing; AI in marketing; marketing ROI; multichannel strategy; influencer marketing; programmatic advertising

1. Introduction

The relationship between the consumers and the brands has undergone changes that cannot be reversed by the digital revolution of the 21st century. Having more than 5.4 billion active internet users globally and having more than 4.8 billion people utilized in social media [4], the shift of consumer focus onto the digital medium is not only an unprecedented challenge but also an opportunity to the marketing professionals. The advertising that used to be the foundation of the brand-building in the mass-media now has to compete with the algorithmically curated content, the peer-generated reviews, and the hyper-personalized digital experiences.

Digital marketing, in a broad sense as the marketing of goods and services by using digital technologies and online medium is the term that has grown out of proportions by its commercial roots in the mid-1990s. Banner advertising and email campaigns were the main features of early digital marketing, but with the advent of the search engine, social media networks, mobile devices, and currently, artificial intelligence, an ecosystem of unprecedented complexity and dynamism has been created. Currently the global digital advertising industry is estimated to be worth about 740 billion dollars [7] with the forecasts indicating that it will have grown to more than 1.1 trillion by the year 2028.

In spite of the high practitioner interest and an ever-increasing academic literature on this topic, there are still a number of critical questions that are not sufficiently answered. The initial one is the comparison of the effectiveness of various digital marketing strategies in different segments of consumers and industry branches. Second, which types of measurement tools best measure both short-term transactional results and long-term brand equity in digital settings? Third, what is the transformation of integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning on targeting, personalization and attribution? Lastly, what are the ethical and regulatory limits that will direct the future of the digital marketing practice?

In this paper, these questions are going to be answered by conducting a systematic review of the available literature, which is going to be complemented by synthesizing the industry reports and case evidence. The rest of the paper is structured in the following way: Section 2 describes the methodology; Section 3 summarizes the key domains of the Digital Marketing Strategy; Section 4 provides the evidence on the effectiveness and measurement; Section 5 is the proposal of the Digital Marketing Effectiveness Framework; Section 6 is the discussion of the theoretical and practical implications; and finally, Section 7 contains the conclusion and directions of further research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Systematic Review Protocol

The proposed research is based on the Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines [19, 20]. There was a systematic search in five of the largest academic databases, which included Web of Science, Scopus, EBSCO Business Source Complete, ProQuest ABI/INFORM, and Google Scholar. Gartner, McKinsey, Nielsen, HubSpot and Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) industry reports were also consulted in order to complement academic results with practitioner evidence.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The studies had to meet the following criteria: (1) must be in a peer-reviewed journals or other reliable publication in the industry; (2) must include quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods empirical data; (3) must be presented in English. The exclusion criteria were: the research was specified as studies that only discussed e-commerce logistics devoid of a marketing element; the studies were unpublished dissertation; and lastly, the research failed to be transparent in their methods.

2.3 Search and Screening Process

The keywords were: digital marketing strategy, social media marketing effectiveness, SEO consumer behavior, content marketing ROI, influencer marketing, programmatic advertising, AI marketing personalization, and marketing analytics. A preliminary search that was done gave 2,341 records. Following the elimination of duplicates (n= 412) and filtering of the results (title and abstract) (n= 1,674), 255 articles were reviewed at the full-text stage. After the full-text evaluation, 87 studies were incorporated into the final synthesis after satisfying all the inclusion criteria.

Table 1. PRISMA Screening Summary

Stage	Records	Retained
Initial database search	2,341	—
After duplicate removal	1,929	1,929
After title/abstract screening	255	255
After full-text review	87	87
Final included studies	87	87

3. Digital Marketing Strategy Domains

3.1 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) becomes one of the best channels of engaging with consumers and communicating with the brand. The platforms like Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Tik Tok, YouTube, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), and Pinterest all have billions daily active users, which can give the marketer unparalleled reach and granularity in targeting. Keegan and Rowley [15] differentiated between organic SMM which is based on the editorial content and community management and paid SMM which includes sponsored posts, display ads and story ads. To achieve the growth of digital marketing, Amin and Nayak [23] explained that effective use of network marketing is regarded as a backbone service to the industry.

The effectiveness of SMM is always regulated by the features of the platforms, the form of the content, and the demographics of the audience, which were proved to be empirical. This has been shown to be because of the video that is being created, especially short-form video on both Tik Tok and Instagram Reels that has yielded significantly higher engagement rates than any other form of posting through images or text [2]. Augmented reality (AR) filters, polls, quizzes, and other interactive content formats have been demonstrated to drive up dwell time and brand recall [21]. Moreover, the changes of algorithms in various platforms have enhanced the role of community-building methods, and the brands are investing in genuine user-generated content (UGC) campaigns as a way of promoting organic reach.

A meta-analysis by Zhang and Gupta [25], which included 34 studies and 12 countries, identified a positive relationship of social media marketing investments with brand awareness ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$), purchase intention ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$) and customer loyalty ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). Nonetheless, the magnitude of effects across sectors of the industry varied significantly, with fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and fashion brands showing more effective results as compared to business services or industrial products.

3.2 Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

The most important discovery method used to research online information and products is still search engines. SEO and SEM are essential elements of any online marketing campaign because Google alone handles about 8.5 billion searches every day [13]. SEO is inclusive of on-page optimization, technical site architecture, quality of content and link-building processes that aim at enhancing organic ranking of a website within search engine result pages (SERPs). SEM is paid search advertising, best exemplified by Google Ads, where the brands bid to appear in sponsored search results.

The SEO environment has changed significantly in the past due to recent advancements in algorithms (notably Helpful Content Update by Google (2022)) and the addition of generative AI to search (Search Generative Experience (SGE)). According to the research conducted by Killoran [16], E-E-A-T cues (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness) have risen in ranking determinants rewarding those brands which create content demonstrably expert. Markup of structured data and core web vital (page speed, interactivity, visual stability) have also become the key technical SEO considerations.

3.3 Content Marketing

Content marketing is a strategic marketing model with the focus being on the production and dissemination of quality, specific, and reliable content that will attract and maintain a well-defined target audience. In contrast to interruptive advertising, content marketing aims at generating consumer trust and purchase intent by informational and educative value. These formats are blog articles, whitepapers, e-books, case studies, webinars, podcasts, infographics and video series.

A longitudinal study by Holliman and Rowley [10], which was later replicated by bigger sample by Johansson and Kask [14], showed that organizations that implemented systematic content marketing strategies had 6.4x higher inbound leads conversion rate than outbound-only programs. The cost-per-lead comparison of content marketing to paid advertising has been pegged at 62 percent cheaper and three times more leads [5]. Nevertheless, volume of investment needed to generate high-quality, search-optimized content is a major obstacle on the way of smaller organizations. Amin and Shah [24] also observed that digital marketing should support development stages of small-scale units since SMEs can grow more upon adopting these services.

3.4 Influencer Marketing

Starting off as a niche strategy, influencer marketing has transformed into a mainstream strategic option; the industry of influencer marketing is expected to reach up to 21.1 billion worldwide in 2023 [12]. The business is by way of establishing brand alliances with people who have substantial online subscriptions and social authority around distinct niches or communities. The levels of influencers include nano-influencers (1, 000-10, 000 followers), mega-influencers and celebrities (1 million and above), with each level having different trade-offs in terms of reach, popularity rate, authenticity and cost.

Empirical studies have already focused on the conclusion that micro- and nano-influencers (10,000-100,000 followers) tend to earn higher rates of engagement and conversion rates compared to macro-influencers, which can be explained by the fact that they are perceived as authentic and are trusted more by their audience [11, 6]. It suggests the idea of parasocial relationships when consumers form the impression of interpersonal relations with the influencers they use as the mediation to influencer marketing effectiveness [22]. Marketers need to be aware of compliance issues brought about by disclosure regulations in most jurisdictions such as the FTC in the United States and the ASA in the United Kingdom.

3.5 Programmatic Advertising and Data-Driven Targeting

The automated purchase and sale of digital advertising inventory by real-time bidding (RTB) ecosystems and demand-side platforms (DSPs) are referred to as programmatic advertising. The technology-based solution gives an opportunity to target the audience more accurately with regard to the behavioral data, demographic cues, relevance by context, and lookalike suggestions. The programmatic advertising market is estimated to be worth \$558 billion in the world in 2023 and is estimated to be expanding at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 22.1 in 2028 [9].

The move toward third-party cookies depreciation, expected of Google Chrome (in 2025) and the strengthening of data privacy laws under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), and similar policies in more than 130 nations are forcing a radically new redesign of the digital advertising architecture. Privacy preserving technologies like federated learning and differential privacy, contextual targeting, and first-party data approaches are becoming a possible alternative to targeting based on third-party cookies [8].

3.6 Email Marketing and Marketing Automation

Email marketing has continued to provide one of the highest ROI of any digital channel marketing tactic, even though it is a relatively mature digital channel. The average ROI of all dollars spent on email marketing according to industry benchmarks stands at 36-42 per dollar [17]. By introducing the marketing automation tools, such as HubSpot, Marketo, Salesforce Marketing Cloud, and ActiveCampaign, it has become possible to perform the behavioral segmentation, personalization of the content and organization of the drip campaigns in multiple steps.

3.7 Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Digital Marketing

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) are starting to pervasively permeate the digital marketing technology stack, and make possible the potential capabilities that were not scaleable in the previous generation of large language models (LLMs) and predictive analytics platforms. Examples of essential AI uses in digital marketing are: predictive customer lifetime value (CLV) modeling; content generation at scale, using natural language generation (NLG); conversational marketing, through AI-based chatbots; sentiment analysis of consumer-generated content; dynamically optimizing price; and bidding and allocating budgets to a campaign in real-time.

Generative AI models, including GPT-4, Claude, and Gemini, are being quickly integrated into content marketing processes by allowing marketers to create first-dough content, optimize it based on search engine optimization, scale personalized messages, and recycle content between formats. According to a survey conducted by McKinsey [18], 71 percent of marketing professionals were already applying generative AI tools in their working processes, and the most commonly used were content generation, data analysis, and campaign optimization. Nevertheless, the issue of the factual accuracy, the voice of the brand, and the ethical implication of AI-generated content, are still at the forefront.

4. Effectiveness and Measurement

4.1 Key Performance Indicators in Digital Marketing

Digital marketing effectiveness can be measured, which is also a strong point that is also a challenge in comparison to traditional marketing. Online media results in enormous amount of granular behavioral data which allows precise attribution of results to a particular marketing activity. Alternatively, the growth of metrics has posed a threat of organizations prioritizing measures that are easy to quantify and strategically shallow at the cost of outcomes that have a business value of importance.

In general, digital marketing KPIs can be grouped into four levels of the purchase funnel, i.e., awareness metrics (impression, reach, share of voice, branded search volume), engagement metrics (click-through rate, engagement rate, time on page, social interaction), conversion metrics (lead generation rate, cost per acquisition, revenue per visit), and loyalty metrics (customer retention rate, net promoter score, customer lifetime value).

4.2 Attribution Modeling

One of the most technically difficult and commercially important issues in digital marketing analytics is marketing attribution, which is the act of giving credit to marketing touchpoints on the customer journey to help it contribute to a desired outcome. The conventional last-click attribution, in which 100 percent of conversion credit is allocated to the final point of contact, is systematically devaluing upper-funnel activities (like content marketing, social media, and display advertising). Multi-touch attribution (MTA) models, such as linear, time-decay, position-based and algorithmic (data-driven) ones, provide a more refined allocation of credit, but they are costly in terms of the data infrastructure and statistical skills.

Table 2. Comparative Effectiveness of Digital Marketing Channels

Channel	Avg. ROI	Brand Awareness	Lead Generation	Best For
Social Media Ads	2.5x–4.1x	High	Medium	B2C, FMCG, Fashion
SEO / Organic Search	5.3x–14.6x	Medium	High	All sectors (long-term)
Content Marketing	4.0x–8.2x	High	High	B2B, SaaS, Education
Email Marketing	\$36–\$42 per \$1	Low	Very High	Retention, E-commerce
Influencer Marketing	3.2x–5.8x	Very High	Medium	B2C, Lifestyle, Beauty
Programmatic Display	1.8x–3.1x	High	Low	Retargeting, Awareness
Paid Search (SEM)	2.9x–5.4x	Medium	Very High	High-intent purchase

Note: ROI estimates are drawn from aggregate industry benchmarks across reviewed studies. Figures represent typical ranges and may vary by sector, budget, and campaign quality.

5. The Digital Marketing Effectiveness Framework (DMEF)

Based on the generated evidence, the present paper hypothesizes the Digital Marketing Effectiveness Framework (DMEF) as an integrative model to plan, implement and assess digital marketing strategies. The DMEF is a combination of four interdependent dimensions:

- **Strategic Alignment:** The alignment of digital marketing should be done by making sure that objectives of digital marketing are closely associated with the overall business and customer acquisition objectives and brand positioning necessities.
- **Channel Integration:** Planning integrated multichannel campaigns where each of the individual digital touchpoints supports each other and is coordinated through the consumer journey mapping.
- **Data Infrastructure:** Laying the foundation of first-party data collection infrastructure, permission management, and analytics infrastructure that is adequate to enable meaningful attribution and personalization.
- **Persistent Optimization:** Integrating a test-and-learn culture where A/B and multivariate testing, incrementality experiment and campaign review, and performance generate recursive quality.

The DMEF is not tied down to a particular platform since it is acknowledged that the channels, tools and tactics at the disposal of the marketer will keep on changing. It is valuable because its logic of decision-making in the form of structures can be applicable irrespective of the technological environment. Notably, the framework has also added an ethical and regulatory compliance layer, which is associated with growing the significance of consumer data rights, transparency of algorithmic decision-making, and responsible standards of advertising.

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This review contributes to the digital marketing literature in a number of ways. First, it presents a total, contemporary synthesis of effectual evidence in all key digital marketing channels, filling in the deficiencies of previous reviews that were more likely to concentrate on specific channels independently. Second, the suggested DMEF provides a new integrative framework that is based on empirical evidence and practice, yet it builds upon the previous conceptual frameworks like the RACE framework [1] and the Customer Decision Journey [3] by clearly integrating the data infrastructure and ethical compliance aspects. Third, the review implies that the unexplored mediation between digital marketing investment and consumer outcomes through the use of AI-powered personalization is an interesting target to take into the future, as it would provide the promising agenda of future empirical research.

6.2 Practical Implications

To the marketing practitioners, the results of this review highlight some of the strategic priorities. To begin with, the need to invest in first-party data infrastructure has now turned into a competitive emergency due to the depreciation of cookies and the growing privacy regulation. Those organizations that fail to make this transition in time might find their targeting and attribution pretty disrupted. Second, the integrated multichannel evidence that is consistently outperforming the single channel investments, points to the organizational structure and agency relations that support the cross channel coordination as opposed to channel siloing.

Third, the effectiveness premium of personalization attested in numerous studies points to the fact that investment in customer data platforms (CDPs), AI-powered recommendation engines, and dynamic content systems has a high chance of better returns as opposed to spending more money on advertising inventory on its own. Fourth, the influencer marketing brands must focus on long-term partnering forms with micro- and nano-influencers synonymous with their brand values instead of on sponsorship transactions with accounts of high reach in order to get the most authenticity and conversion rates.

6.3 Ethical and Regulatory Considerations

The digital marketing practice that has been analyzed in this paper raises important ethical issues that should be explicitly considered. There are explicit surveillance, manipulation, and discriminatory targeting dangers to the collection and use of consumer data on a scale. On the one hand, AI-based personalization is a promising solution in the business perspective, but it leads to the issue of filter bubbles, dark patterns, and the exploitation of psychological weaknesses. Ad fraud, brand safety risks,

and funding misinformation have been attributed to programmatic advertising ecosystems. It is a professional and social obligation of marketers to practice strategies that uphold consumer autonomy, safeguard vulnerable groups, and a healthy information ecosystem.

7. Conclusions and Future Research Directions

The paper has given a systematic review of digital marketing strategies and how they have been effective in consuming consumer engagement and business outcomes. The above evidence proves the undeniable prioritization of strategic priorities: the integration of multichannel strategies, the ability to provide first-party data, AI-driven personalization, and genuine content creation are the most continuously efficient investments digital marketers can make in the modern context. The suggested Digital Marketing Effectiveness Framework is a guide in the development of the strategy which is both practical and theoretically based.

This review has a number of significant implications on future studies. To begin with, longitudinal research studies of the long-term brand equity effects of digital marketing investments are uncommon; most of the current research would profile short-term behavioral effects. Second, the entrepreneurial efficiency of generative AI technologies should be examined on a regular basis, because the existing evidence is mostly anecdotal or based on vendor-funded research. Third, comparative studies on cross culture are required to learn how the effectiveness of digital marketing in different cultural, linguistic, and regulatory settings differs. Fourth, studies exploring the welfare consequences of algorithmic targeting on consumer psychology and information setting in society are a very important and under-researched question.

With the digital marketing sphere constantly changing at a fast pace due to AI promotion, growing numbers of connected devices via the Internet of Things (IoT), increasing popularity of social commerce, and the gradual introduction of immersive technologies like augmented and virtual reality, the presented-here frameworks and findings will have to be continuously updated and refined. It is our hope that this review offers a valuable base to the scholars interested in advancing the theoretical comprehension of the digital marketing and the practitioners interested in receiving evidence-based guidance on strategic decision making.

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Author Contributions

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This is a systematic review based on publicly available published studies. No new primary data were generated. All reviewed sources are listed in the reference list.

Ethics Statement

This study is a systematic review of published literature and did not involve human participants, animal subjects, or personal data. No ethics approval was required.

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