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## **Digital Marketing in the Digital Era: The Booming Virtual Promotion Tools**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The marketing promotion has undergone a phenomenal metamorphosis ever since the smart phone invaded our lifestyle. It is witnessed globally the dominance of the digital means in almost all the spheres of life that allows no option than to adapt and embrace. One obvious example of forced adaptability is the myriad of advertisements that pop up while browsing any type of content. The introduction of social media further accelerated the pace at which these changes impact the promotional aspects of any product or service. Digital media works as a catalyst for business and professional growth while seamlessly integrating even the most subliminal demands of the customers, with more proactive promotional strategies and better applications of them. Promotion as a form of integrated marketing communication has come of age to become most apt and upright. Some argue that conventional marketing dictums would no longer hold well, and it may be partially true, as the doctrines remain intact and the game-changer is only “the way they are integrated” with regard to speed and time of delivery. It is essential to target the right customer and the right content while attempting to be creative through relevant touchpoints. The present paper attempts to throw light on the emergence of digital marketing tools that help boost marketing efforts more than before and outcomes apparently be unassuming.

Keywords: Social Marketing, Virtual Promotion, SEO, Digital Communication

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### **Introduction**

Digital marketing has transformed the way companies manage and communicate with their customers and society worldwide. It is becoming a key and necessary instrument to face the challenges that still exist in the field of marketing, ((Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez, & Prado-Roman, 2019). Invariably, the premise of promotion continues to believe in the triad i.e., “to inform, to entice, and engage.” The key function of marketing promotion got tucked-in the novae of “digital marketing”. Perhaps, the innovations of technology and people’s virtual lifestyles helped companies to design and find new ways of touching the customer’s feelings, emotions, perceptions, and interests. Connecting with the customer, convincing the customer, and converting the customer by gaining their trust are the essence of marketing efforts (Batra R & Keller, K.L, 2016). Promotional aspects play a key role in streamlining the reach of product portfolios with minimum effort. For example, whenever a housewife opens her mobile phone to play a game during leisure time, at some point, a video clip on Nivea or Parachute will appear on the screen. The lady will have to watch for a minimum of 5 seconds or a maximum of 30 seconds, with an option to skip after the first 5 seconds. That means companies are finding that even a 5-second clip can make a difference in promoting the product and can make an impact on the consumer's mind. Similarly, whenever a movie or a video lecture is watched by a student, ads of various categories will pop up, most of which would relate to the subject of their relevance: BYJU’s, an online coaching platform, TestprepKart, a test preparation centre for SAT, JEE, NEET, ACT. Similar instances are cited while watching a series on Netflix, Premium, or Hotstar, popping up with 5 to 10 second ads for various products. As observers, we all must be wondering how these ads pop up so suddenly without subscribing to those channels. Well, the answer lies in the selection of media. The burgeoning social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Telegram, and WhatsApp allow companies to pitch any product or service at a pace that the conventional media could imagine. In addition to being the fastest medium of communication, it is cost-effective and accurate.

Thus, the whole gamut of business processing evolved into a different ball game. The previous strategy of promoting the product by spreading its focus on a layered approach is now toppled with unanimity of media selling (Bala & Verma, 2018). Kudos to the technology that continues to evolve and reshape businesses and promotional paradigms that park products and services at the doorsteps of the right customer. The magnitude of the marketing mix is conspicuously influenced by the introduction of technology. It is blessed with both opportunities and threats. With the help of technological inputs, the time and resources used while preparing and promoting commercials may be optimally applied (Ansari, Essengair, & Kohli, 2000). This further helps in reaching the appropriate audience groups for their products or services. On the negative side, the speed and frequent modifications of the technology may be a challenge for promoters and advertisers.

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## Method

The secondary sources are tapped to furnish the foundations of thought on the conceptual framework of this emerging field of marketing space. Numerous published sources such as papers, digital content available on the websites, google scholar, EBSCO, other html content has been used to filter the essence and presented in a capsule form. This will enable the marketing agents and practitioners as well as budding research scholars to ponder on any one or all of these tools while testing to know their impact on effectiveness of marketing outcomes.

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## Explanation of the Results

In essence, the whole concept of promotion has undergone a virtual revolution. Whether we label it as “technology-driven marketing or managing through technology,” the net results are unthinkable and have never witnessed earlier (Balmer & Yen, 2017). The tools to communicate has undergone radical surgery especially during the past decade. Human beings are social animals and continue to get connected through virtual means such as the Internet, social media platforms. Marketing professionals observe this as a new avenue to pitch their products or services. Let’s scan through the media tools equally catching both customers and businessmen in this era of virtual communication.

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## E-Commerce and Digital Communication

Undeniably, the world around us has changed due to the influences of e-commerce and digital communication tools (Ansari & Mela, E-customisation, 2003). This has impacted every facet of life, both professionally and personally. Some of the factors that have pushed us towards these unprecedented trends include:

- The application of e-commerce and m-commerce in businesses is constantly increasing.
- Innovative product designs explore and exploit new technology
- Businesses resorting to digital media for promotional output and to satisfy the end-users
- Cost-effective, accurate, and efficient methods
- Setting competitive pricing due to easy access across retailers and markets

The pre-digitalized business world applies for its promotion through stereotyped platforms such as newspapers, television and radio, broadcasting tools and outdoor banners, hoardings, and kiosks (Chauhan, Agrawal, & Chauhan, 2015). Though they are not out of the media space yet, the overwhelming online markets create serious challenges to their sustenance and competitive spirits. Even the signboards and hoardings on the outdoor displays have gone digital. As a result, ads and promotional campaigns have become faster, smarter, more creative, and more innovative than before to capture the interests of the digital generation (gen-Z) and millennials alike.

The world got shrunk. Whatever we browse on the Internet will give us related ads on our mobile phones, channels we subscribe to and watch, on our emails as constant reminders. This seems quite like magic, but it’s not so. Google filters all of the key terms we often use while browsing and begins to link us to the related information through smart tools which help companies pitch directly to the targeted customers (Chatterjee, Hoffman, & Novak, 2003). Unlike conventional signboards, hoardings, and newspaper ads that superficially count the readership and their conversion ratio, the rubrics and metrics are noticed instantly by both receiver and sender.

### *How Digital Media Changes the Marketing Mix*

Product and service promotion strategies have gone beyond the retro ads in newspapers and display ads, steering into 30-second time slots during television soaps, roadside hoardings, and kiosks (Halbheer, Stahl, Koenigsberg, & Lehmann, 2014). All of these, however, have their presence in the marketing portfolios, with dim results and lowered attention of the consumers. There may be countries without a continuous water supply, but people in those places will still be using smartphones. So, consumers are speaking online, but are marketing professionals listening? To be in sync with the current market, marketing professionals have to go the extra mile to gain knowledge on the digital paraphernalia that customers are now constantly tuned to (Chakravarty, Kumar, & Grewal). Let us sift through some of the ways in which digital media has attempted to disrupt the marketing mix.

Viewers are allowed to block ads. Often, people view the ads that interrupt their streaming entertainment unexcitedly. Acknowledging the privacy and selective behaviour of consumers, companies have introduced the option of a minimum viewing time that is tolerable and relaxing. It is both a challenge as well as an opportunity to advance into other domains of consumer preferences and set advertisement portfolios accordingly. Leveraging viewers to share their feelings across their circles was not possible through predatory promotional avenues. Digital media, however, especially social media, opened the doors for people to share and care for their fellow members by sharing information they feel useful or dangerous, or would significantly enrich their lives. These viewers are able to directly interact on various channels and social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Chat-rooms to discuss and describe their opinions, leaving companies to attempt to modify them if possible. This is a way companies manage branding while valuing the opinions of customers.

Equal opportunity for anyone to become a brand ambassador. Unlike the previous era of promotion through celebrity endorsements, such as Amitabh Bachchan's advertising for Cadbury's, digital media allows anyone with a good social media following to become a brand ambassador. In fact, these group influencers are duly paid for their rapport creation and encouraged by allowing freebies in their direct sales. There is open competition amongst

similar brands. Digital and social media is so enormous that it works with perfected cost-effective models and thus allows even the small businessman to advertise in media comfortably and compete with giants. Companies constantly watch channels and social media that have high membership and target their products at a cheaper cost-per-click.

### ***Often Used Digital Tools***

It's a bygone era to visit a library and pick up a dictionary to find out the meaning or synonym of a word or open the annual report of a company to check its financial strengths. All of this and much more information is available at the click of a button on personal computers in the modern day. The times have changed and so do the usage of tools to cope with the times. Some of the digital technologies and media that are part of our daily lives include the following:

- Company websites
- Mobile applications
- Social media home pages
- Search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Hotmail, Rediffmail, Microsoft Edge
- Emails and blogs
- Joint ventures with other digital companies

No technology can be disintegrated outright. Thus, it's always better to stay integrated and connected with conventional media tools such as print, television, direct mail, and other outdoor systems so that they can supplement and complement each other while motivating and informing customers regularly (Ghose, Goldfarb, & Han). Such integration allows the value of the work to improve and redefine the parameters of "work itself." Related to this context, a very relevant lifecycle theory was explored through one of the professional media platforms, LinkedIn.

### ***Social Media Platforms***

The general public has shifted to the next generation of tools to communicate. They are using WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Telegram, TikTok, and others for everyday communication through their smartphones. This has signaled brands to use these platforms to help directly influence users with limited wastage. Statistically speaking, nearly 63% of people around the world access social media while spending, on average, a seventh of their time awake interacting on multiple accounts. For marketing professionals, there can't be a bigger, sweeter, and cheaper way than this to strike their promotional chord. To facilitate marketing promotions, these media platforms allow commercials to sponsor their content and distribute ads with minimum costs. The team of professionals in these platforms help segment users so specific ads will be sent into the feeds of those target audiences. Not all platforms will have the same length and breadth of customers, so the demographics of customers in every platform will define the marketing team's plan to design and post accordingly. Social media has become a craze among Z and millennials, thus companies willing to put in the work and meet their emotional connections can consider it an opportunity to promote products or services organically. There is a high likelihood that once a customer is satisfied with a product, it will be openly shared with other group members. Also, some companies prefer to interact with regular customers and seek their feedback through a questionnaire or direct online interviews. This encourages participation from the customer and can build a strong bond with such brands.

### ***Influencer Marketing***

When Amitabh Bachchan is seen advertising for "covishield vaccination," people who were reluctant and apprehensive of its negative effects were influenced and initiated to get vaccinated. That's the power of brand ambassadorship. In digital media, no high-profile celebrity would be endorsing the product, rather someone from a social media group would be initiating and influencing their followers, as they are in regular contact (Haenlein). Eventually, such brands would get exposed and connected to those followers who might be interested in their content and offers. Since like-minded people will have the same interests, there is a high possibility that their feedback will be received positively by their peer group and this allows the marketers to gain their fair share. Marketing professionals will be keen to use influencers who can directly touch the points of satisfaction with customers to increase repeat purchase potential. Women tend to follow these influencers and try these advertised products more often than men. For instance, some women suffer from frequent hair fallout, despite using commonly advertised and available brands. Since people share their experiences on social media platforms, a woman may get tips on a new product worth experimenting with. Once her experiments prove successful, she will share this and endorsements will spread like wildfire across groups.

### ***Email Marketing***

In a constantly evolving digital landscape, company websites, social media platforms, and other digital tools may be frequently changed. What remains a steadfast and dependable method of communicating with customers is email. As per 2020 statistics, there are 4 billion email users, which is almost half of the world's population. According to one available online source, the total number of email users in the current year 2021 has increased to an estimated 4.1 billion. If this continues, it can be predicted that by the year 2024 the number of email users will go up to 4.5 billion with an average growth rate of 3% every year (Statista, Radicati). Email marketing is an instant inbox action that meets both ends. When we receive a customized email from a company, we often feel honoured and reflect accordingly to the mail. It is easy to stay connected to customers when sending them personalized updates and offers based on their previous shopping history and brand association. For example, when a housewife gets mail in her inbox from Nalini

Sarees to check the latest offers and free delivery, under the most coveted customer group, she would be delighted to order more. This would be another way of increasing “impulsive buying” and gaining a sale. Through feedback forms, it is found that for 60–65% of customers, email plays a key role in their purchase decisions.

### ***SEO and Content Marketing***

“Whoever controls the door to the Internet, controls the Internet” (Ian Dodson, 2018). Search engines have become the default entry point to the Internet. Whenever we want anything, our fingers automatically go to Google search and type the keywords. In the flash of an eye, all related information will be displayed on the screen. We hardly know what happens at the backend during the search, we just browse and we get it. It’s like the saying “Google smells like a sniffer dog,” it keeps an eye on all the activities performed using the google platform. There is a backend process that takes care of recording, analyzing, and refining web sources constantly, based on the client’s visits and the content that gets posted on related web pages. Eventually, such revelations get enumerated and pulled into an indexed inventory that helps optimize the outcomes. SEO and content marketing go hand-in-hand, allowing marketing teams to be proactive in furnishing answers to frequently asked questions. The fundamental role of marketing specialists is to develop content, prepare suitable videos, and create similar substantiating assets to provide conceptual answers in context. The process of developing these assets passes through three stages: awareness, consideration, and decision.

### ***Pay-per-Click (PPC)***

One of the revenue generation models is pay-per-click (PPC). The advertiser pays the digital media administrator only when the user clicks on their advertisement. Whether a user may make a purchase or not stands secondary. In other words, the traffic on the web is purchased by advertisers. Indeed, marketers prefer to post their ads on popular websites and search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft Bing, and pay those platform administrators per click when such ads are clicked on by the user. The appearance of such ads can be managed depending on the content display, which may usually be on the top of the page, but may also be custom designed and placed as per the choice of the marketers.

### ***Affiliate Marketing***

This is a kind of referral marketing. This can be negotiated amongst the same group members as well as with outside consultants. For example, Airtel sends an offer to refer a friend and get an additional 1 GB free add-on to their network, which may work well for friends and others. Some companies sign up to collaborate and connect with marketing professionals for which they may charge a commission. A similar commission could be determined based on the number of connections mobilized in a specific period or may be open to a target number. Often, this is opted not as a standalone model, but rather is used as a supplementary promotional tool by most marketing professionals. Though it is cost-effective, there is no guarantee they will hit their target goals. An example of affiliate marketing would be when an ad running on a podcast or radio show offers a discount code for listeners to use when purchasing the product. The customer may receive 30% off their purchase, for example, and in return, the show gets a small percentage of each purchase that is made using the code.

### ***Mobile Marketing***

People are fond of their phones more than anything else these days. Some are identified by the brand of phone they possess. “Mobile,” as it goes, is always on the move. A decade ago, people could hardly imagine something like this would be available, but now forgetting a phone is akin to missing a heartbeat. Currently, there are 3.8 billion smartphone users in the world, according to the latest Statista report. A smart marketing promoter would not want to miss this grand chance of capturing such a huge chunk of prospective customers. Most of the strategies discussed earlier will still work even on mobile marketing, as the users will interface through the mail, social media chats, and other official sources of connecting through various smartphone applications. Having a smartphone in the present day is not a luxury, but rather a necessity, and thus everything is managed with a phone in hand. Because of this, ads are usually delivered on mobile apps, gaming websites, social media, etc., all to gain the attention of the users.

### ***Limitations of the Paper***

The present paper envelops only the conceptual framework relating to the digital media tools that could be applied by marketing professionals in the changing scenario. The research process comprises of only secondary information sourced through webpages, relevant published articles in various journal domains, and other printed material revealing the concepts as well as relevance.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Digital marketing or virtual marketing promotion is the need of the hour irrespective of composition and complexity of the company dealing with different portfolios. To sustain in the marketing space and continue to make the consumer feel the presence of the products and services, marketing professionals inevitably to tap these tools and adapt quickly. Digital marketing tools are found to be more effective compared to the conventional print media and other conventional marketing tools.

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