

# DEVELOPING **DIGITAL MARKETING**

RELATIONSHIP PERSPECTIVES



EDITED BY  
PARK THAICHON AND VANESSA RATTEN

# **Developing Digital Marketing**

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# Developing Digital Marketing: Relationship Perspectives

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## Chapter 1

# The Development and Current Trends of Digital Marketing and Relationship Marketing Research

*Dung Le, Tuyet-Mai Nguyen, Sara Quach, Park Thaichon and Vanessa Ratten*

### Abstract

New information and communication technologies have transformed the ways businesses communicate and maintain relationships with their customers. In this chapter, we review the main topics in academic research pertaining to digital marketing and relationship perspectives. The discussion involves email and website marketing, search engine marketing, user-generated content, co-creation marketing, social media marketing, prosumption marketing in the sharing economy, immersive marketing and AI-based marketing. On this basis, the chapter proposes some future research directions including influencer marketing, live streaming, social service enhancement and the dark side of social media marketing, consumer-to-consumer interactions on two-sided platforms, psychological mechanisms related to the use of mixed realities, and the experience of AI-enabled service automation and relevant ethical issues. Furthermore, emerging technologies such as the Internet of things (IoT) and blockchain are expected to be the next breakthrough in marketing, which warrant further research to examine their impact on the customer-firm relationship. It is suggested the researchers could focus on the adoption and application of blockchain technology, participative marketing via IoT, as well as the privacy and data protection issues related to these technologies. This chapter provides a comprehensive picture of the connection between digital marketing and relationship marketing in academic research.

*Keywords:* Digital marketing; relationship marketing; online relationship marketing; relationship perspectives; technology; digital technologies

## **Introduction**

Relationship marketing involves the development of strong relationships between exchange partners that enhance satisfaction, trust, value, commitment, and loyalty and ultimately improve profitability (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006; Thaichon, Liyanaarachchi, Quach, Weaven, & Bu, 2019). Although there is increasing research in consumer or business management acceptance of new technologies and digital marketing (Thaichon, Brown, & Weaven, 2020), the impact of technologies and digital marketing on relationship marketing are often not adequately investigated, leading to overstated hypothetical predictions of its future potential (Thaichon et al., 2019).

In addition, the information and communication technologies (ICT) have transformed the ways businesses communicate and maintain relationships with customers. The booming development of digital technologies (i.e. the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence, deep learning) and smart devices (individual laptops, smartphones) empower businesses to effectively target micro-consumer segments and influence consumer behaviour (Dwivedi, Rana, Slade, Singh, & Kizgin, 2020). Therefore, understanding the connection between new technologies and relationship marketing is becoming even more important.

To map the development of digital marketing and relationship perspectives and provide a thorough review of research insights, we highlight some relevant trends in the composition of digital marketing in response to technological change, which leads to some predictions regarding the future of digital marketing.

### ***Development of Digital Marketing and Relationship Perspectives in Academic Research***

Along with the development of ICT, digital marketing research has focused on exploring consumer behaviour in the digital environment and relating the use of digital technologies to the outcomes of marketing actions. Fig. 1.1 shows eight main research streams in digital marketing since the creation of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the 1960s. Overall, marketing research has demonstrated how digital technologies can be effectively used for marketing purposes.

### ***Email and Website Marketing***

Early digital marketing research investigates how consumer visit websites and response to email advertising. A model proposed by Novak, Hoffman, and Yung (1996) incorporates the concept of flow experience to explain consumer browsing behaviour. Later, researchers modelled consumer website navigation based on the actual clickstream, emphasising learning effects, within-site lock-in, time constraints and cost-benefit trade-offs as critical factors to influence consumer decision to continue browsing more pages (or exiting) (Bucklin & Sismeiro, 2003). More importantly, there are various types of website visitors (buying, browsing, searching or knowledge-building) who response differentially to various marketing messages

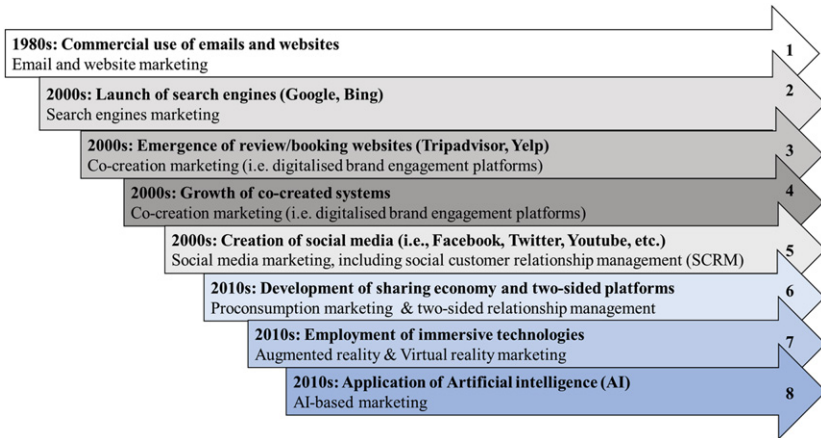


Fig. 1.1. Major Research Streams in Digital Marketing Over Time.

(Moe, 2003). Such typology allows businesses to design more effective and customised promotional message.

In addition to website marketing, email advertising has been widely used as a cost-effective marketing channel. For example, emails can generate positive word-of-mouth if they are forwarded to the receivers’ network (Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004) as well as increase website traffic (Ansari & Mela, 2003). However, companies are recommended not to overuse email communication because email targeting can also have a backfire effect (Ansari, Mela, & Neslin, 2008). Today, email marketing is in the danger of the overrun by unwanted commercial email (known as spam) and requires the application of appropriate mitigation strategies (Pavlov, Melville, & Pllice, 2008).

### Search Engine Marketing

The development of search engines such as Google, Yahoo and MSN in the 2000s provides marketers with a powerful tool to influence consumer behaviour which is more effective than offline advertising (Dinner, Heerde Van, & Neslin, 2014) and email marketing (Wiesel, Pauwels, & Arts, 2011). Research shows the spill-over effect from generic to branded paid search ads (Rutz, Bucklin, & Sonnier, 2012) as well as from traditional marketing channels such as TV advertising (Joo, Wilbur, & Zhu, 2016). More importantly, consumers acquired through paid searches tend to purchase more and thus creates higher lifetime value than consumers acquired by other marketing channels (Chan, Wu, & Xie, 2011).

Businesses receive keyword performance reports from search engine companies such as Google to evaluate the effectiveness of their paid search marketing based on some key criteria: number of clicks, click-through-rate, the average cost per click, conversion rate, etc. (Kannan, 2017). The position of search ads significantly

influences consumer navigation. The click-through rate is higher for search ads on the top of the result page and decreases when the ads move down (Agarwal, Hosanagar, & Smith, 2011). The ad position is thus more important for smaller or unknown companies in influencing consumer behaviour (Narayanan & Kalyanam, 2015). However, the conversion rate increase with a lower position, suggesting that the topmost position is not necessarily the revenue- or profit-maximising position (Agarwal et al., 2011). This is because the conversion rate is more related to the presence of brand name and product information (Rutz et al., 2012).

It is worth noting that search engines offer organic versus paid listings of websites in response to the keywords used by consumers. Hence, businesses should consider both search engine optimisation to improve their organic ranking on the search engine results pages and paid search ads to gain more positive behavioural outcomes. Using a hierarchical Bayesian modelling framework, Yang and Ghose (2010) demonstrate that total click-through rates, conversions rates, and revenues in the presence of both paid and organic search listings are significantly higher than those in the absence of paid search advertisements. As consumers have become more proficient at advisement avoidance on the Internet (Seyedghorban, Tahernejad, & Matanda, 2016), a positive level of search engine optimisation may improve the search engine's ranking quality, the satisfaction of website visitors and higher marketing effectiveness (Berman & Katona, 2013).

### *User-generated Content (UGC)*

The emergence of online review websites provides insightful data for companies to map their competitive brand positions in comparison with competitors over time (Tirunillai & Tellis, 2014). Also, social tagging data and developed tag-based metrics (i.e. brand familiarity, favourability of associations and competitive overlaps) can be used as proxy measures for brand equity and explanation of unanticipated stock returns (Nam & Kannan, 2014). Interestingly, offline marketing is beneficial in managing online reviews. For example, an increase in offline advertising is correlated with an increase in the volume of brand discussion and a decrease in negative reviews (Tirunillai & Tellis, 2012).

Early research to investigate the impact of online review reveals a close relationship between consumers' online reviews (including two dimensions: product evaluations and social dynamics) and sales (Moe & Trusov, 2011). In addition to organic electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), businesses have also been proactive in generating their eWOM by encouraging less loyal customers, even non-customers to be involved in eWOM campaigns (Bu, Parkinson, & Thaichon, 2020).

A major challenge in managing UGC is the declining trend of the proportion of favourable ratings and reviews over time. The valance of online reviews has even higher elasticity (0.417) than the volume elasticity (0.236), in particular for private businesses (You, Vadakkepatt, & Joshi, 2015). There are several explanations for this downward trend of online reviews (Ying, Feinberg, & Wedel, 2006), which found that active reviewers, who consist of the majority of the online reviewer population, gave lower ratings than less active reviewers. In addition, customers

seem to have lower utility from the product consumption and thus post lower evaluations over time (Li & Hitt, 2008). Finally, 5% of online reviews on a retailer's website is produced by non-customers who never purchase products and are often more negative than the average review (Anderson & Simester, 2014). This phenomenon of self-selection biases and deception need to be corrected in order to improve customer relationships with brands.

### ***Co-creation Marketing***

The concept of co-creation defined as 'joint creation of value by the company and the customer' (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 8). In traditional marketing, the company creates value through its value chain and markets its value offerings to customers. Co-creation marketing, in contrast, enables customers to have a voice and be involved in co-construct personalised consumption experiences that they are 'willing to pay for'. Four building blocks of interactions for co-creation of value include dialogue, access, risk/benefits and transparency (DART) (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In addition to the DART model, the service-dominant theory (Vargo & Lusch, 2008) provides more guidance for organisations in co-creating value with customers. Later, Payne, Storbacka, and Frow (2008) develop a theoretical framework of key processes in managing value co-creation and its implications for product/service development.

Marketing researchers have highlighted the role of information technology (IT), in particular, the Internet, in enabling co-creation marketing (Quach, Shao, Ross, & Thaichon, 2019; Quach & Thaichon, 2017). The development of interactive websites (i.e. web 2.0) has moved practices of co-creation to the centre of a firm's digital marketing. Furthermore, digitalised brand engagement platforms, which entail assemblage systems designed around enterprise activities such as connecting with customers, employees, partners or any other stakeholders, accelerate value creation with these co-creators (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). More specifically, co-creating brand identity consists of three management-led processes: (1) 'nurturing brand passion', (2) 'bridging' corporate brand identity meanings and (3) 'partnering' associated activities with online community members and other stakeholders (Essamri, McKechnie, & Winklhofer, 2019). Also, social networking sites can be used as beneficial engagement platforms for brand co-creation when marketers ensure three key factors: social commerce information sharing, social support and relationship quality (Tajvidi, Richard, Wang, & Hajli, 2018).

### ***Social Media Marketing***

The rise of social media as a popular channel for digital marketing requires businesses to develop social media competence (Dwivedi et al., 2020). When it is used strategically in alignment with organisational objectives, social media marketing can increase customer satisfaction, perceived value (Chen & Lin, 2019), positive attitude (Shareef, Mukerji, Alryalat, Wright, & Dwivedi, 2018), customer

participation (Quach, Shao, Ross, & Thaichon, 2020), brand loyalty (Shanahan, Tran, & Taylor, 2019), word of mouth (Bu et al., 2020), brand equity and relationship equity (Kim & Ko, 2012). Businesses employ social media platforms to interact more with their customers and thus improve consumer relationship management. However, social media could harm the firms' brands when customers share their negative experiences (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017). Also, consumers often express a negative attitude towards invasive and distracting advertising on social media (Knoll, 2016). Therefore, various social media metrics are proposed to measure the impact and value of social media marketing activities (Arora & Sanni, 2019).

Social media platforms are decentralised systems which empower both companies and consumers to engage in interactive communication. There is a small group of key influencers on social media who have some expertise in specific areas related to the brands such as healthy living, travel, food, lifestyle, beauty or fashion. They attract a lot of followers and thus can deliver relatively more trustworthy messages to a broad range of audience compared to firm-generated advertisements (Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020). The influencers can act as brand ambassadors and co-produce the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Interestingly, the disclosure language featuring 'Paid Ad' related to Influencer posts positively increases ad recognition, which subsequently interacted with participants' memory of disclosure and mediated the effect of disclosure language on attitude toward the brand and sharing intention. (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017). However, the normalisation of paid influencers could mitigate this effect (Busca & Bertrandias, 2020).

### ***Prosumption Marketing in the Sharing Economy***

In the sharing economy, companies are put in the position of competing with 'pro consumers' who are involved in both production and consumption. Hence, the sharing economy challenges the foundations of marketing's traditional beliefs and practices (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Sharing companies such as Lyft (car-sharing), Airbnb (room/house rental) or Zilok (goods rental) do not produce the offers but only assemble both producers and consumers on network platforms (Busca & Bertrandias, 2020). The sharing business models are somehow similar to two-sided platforms such as eBay (connecting individual customers with other individual sellers), Alibaba or Amazon (connecting businesses to customers), Kickstarter (start-ups with the crowd).

In contrast with traditional business models, the revenue of sharing businesses and/or two-sided platform companies come from one or a combination of commissions from involved parties (Kannan, 2017). Therefore, Kumar, Lahiri, and Dogan (2018) proposed a double-sided customer relationship framework that will help these special firms to manage both customer development and producers/sellers development. A pioneering research marketing communications of sharing platforms was conducted by Costello and Reczek (2020), showing that provider-focused (versus platform-focused) marketing communications lead to higher

levels of willingness to pay, the likelihood of making a purchase and downloading the platform app.

### ***Immersive Marketing***

Technological advancements enable the integration of virtual elements into consumers' perception of the real-world (i.e. augmented reality) and/or the creation of totally virtual environments (i.e., virtual reality). Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) enable consumers to virtually experience products/services consumption, enrich imagination and thus elicit more positive emotions and/or attitude (Rauschnabel, Felix, & Hinsch, 2019). Marketing researchers have examined some important questions related to immersive technologies such as how AR & VR drive consumption and/or purchase behaviour through cognitive and affective mechanisms (Hilken, de Ruyter, Chylinski, Mahr, & Keeling, 2017) or how consumers develop attachment, engagement and identity being induced by virtual objects (Nagy & Koles, 2014). The S-O-R (stimulus-organism-response) model is often employed to explain consumer behaviour in partly or entirely virtual environments (Poushneh, 2018; Roschk, Loureiro, & Breitsohl, 2017).

### ***AI-based Marketing***

Artificial intelligence (AI) is considered as a game-changer technology, which has been used for various marketing purposes, including market segmentation and targeting, customer relationships management, supply chain management, business intelligence and knowledge management, personal selling, pricing strategies, web intelligence (e.g. chatbot, virtual assistance), consumer services (e.g. robots) (Martínez-López & Casillas, 2013). AI can be leveraged along the consumer journey, from need/want recognition to personalised recommendations and post-purchase delight (Kietzmann, Paschen, & Treen, 2018).

Despite the broad applications of AI, marketing research in this area is somewhat limited with a heavy focus on the potential of AI applications and consumer adoption of AI (Prentice, Weaven, & Wong, 2020). For example, Morosan and Bowen (2018) examined how an AI system, which can track customer information to personalise services, is beneficial in customer relations management. Huang and Rust (2018) explored four bits of intelligence (i.e. mechanical, analytical, intuitive and empathetic) and suggested innovative ways of human-machine integration for providing services. Given that consumers perceive AI as being less empathetic (Luo, Tong, Fang, & Qu, 2019). Also, consumers are less likely to adopt AI services when identity motives are important drivers of consumptions (Leung, Paolacci, & Puntoni, 2018).

## **The Future Research Direction of Digital Marketing and Relationship Perspectives**

Digital technologies have continued to transform marketing practices. Businesses are increasing investments in technology for cost efficiency and product/service personalisation. In addition to the continuous development of social media, two-sided platforms, immersive technologies and artificial intelligence, emerging technologies such as the IoT and blockchain are expected to be the next breakthrough in marketing (Kumar, Ramachandran, & Kumar, 2020). Table 1.1 introduces key research directions related to these digital technologies that will advance the existing literature.

### ***Social Media Marketing***

Given that social media marketing remains an important marketing channel (Quach et al., 2019, 2020), further research is needed to explore recent social media marketing trends such as influencer marketing, live streaming and social service enhancement. A small portion of social media users gain a reputation for their expertise in a specific area (e.g., beauty products, make-up, fashion) and thus exert more or less influence over their followers (Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani, & Dwivedi, 2019). Yet, less is known about how social media influencers acquire their persuasive power and how ‘branded contents’ posted by influencers affect followers’ intention to acquired brands (Ki et al., 2020). Some studies have explored consumer motivation and intention to shop via live streaming, more research on companies’ sales strategies through live streaming is beneficial (Wongkitrungrueng, Dehouche, & Assarut, 2020).

Marketing research has been focusing on the positive impact of social media marketing on consumer behaviour; the dark side of social media marketing remains largely overlooked. While companies have been using social media data to gain valuable insights into consumers’ brand perception (Lee, 2018), consumers may develop a negative attitude toward such social media listening practices (Jacobson, Gruzd, & Hernández-García, 2020). Recent scandals of Facebook and its secretive data sharing arrangements have also raised consumers’ privacy concerns and led to a loss of trust (Kanter, 2018). Therefore, it is vital to investigate consumers’ attitudes and opinions toward marketers’ use of social media data and how transparency in consumers’ data analysis can improve brand relationships with customers.

### ***Prosumption Marketing***

The emergence of two-sided platforms (i.e. sharing economy) requires further understanding of consumer-to-consumer (CtoC) relationships, and a new marketing theory may focus on CtoC marketing (Busca & Bertrandias, 2020). The sharing economy’s unique characteristics are likely to introduce a new set of heuristics and biases that may affect consumer decision making, which should be