

A Theoretical Study on Emerging Issues of Digital Marketing in the Challenging Age

***Dr. Vinod N Sambrani and ** Jayadatta S**

**Professor, Kousali Institute of Management Studies, Karnatak University Dharwad*

***Research Scholar, Kousali Institute of Management Studies Karnatak University Dharwad*

Abstract

Today marketers are certainly faced with wide array of challenges as well as opportunities in this digital age. Digital marketing in common parlance is the utilization of various electronic media by the marketers to successfully promote their products and services into the market. Thus the major objective of digital marketing is all about attracting the customers and also allowing them to interact with the brand through various digital media. The present article focuses on the importance of digital marketing avenues from both marketers and consumers point of view. The digitalization of marketing provides new options for routes to markets, communication, brand building, relationship development, trialing pricing, product development, sourcing insights, as well as a platform for innovation. But, only if businesses embark on this journey, and then keep up with the pace once en route. The implications for business stemming from marketing's digital journey are detailed along with avenues for future research; to develop further understanding of digitalization. The paper also tries to examine the effect of digital marketing on firm's sales. Besides the differences between traditional marketing and digital marketing is also presented in this paper. The present study has also described various forms of digital marketing, effectiveness of it as well as impact of digital marketing on firm's sales. The sample examined however consists of one hundred fifty firms and fifty executives who have been randomly selected to prove the efficiency and effectiveness of digital marketing in the present context. The collected data has

been analyzed and interpreted with the help of various statistical tools and techniques the major being SPSS.

Keywords: *Digital Marketing, Customer reach, Electronic media, digital age, effectiveness*

Introduction

Digital marketing is one such type of marketing which is widely being used to promote products and services which can reach consumers using various digital channels. Besides digital marketing extends beyond internet marketing that which includes channels which do not require the use of internet. It includes the use of mobile phones (both SMS and MMS), display marketing, Social media marketing, Search engine marketing and many other forms of such digital media. Consumers can access information through digital media, any time and at any place wherever and whenever they want. Also with the presence of digital media, consumers do not just rely on what the company says about their brand but also they can follow what the media, their friends, associations, peers etc are saying and interpreting as well. Digital marketing thus is a broad term that which refers to various promotional techniques deployed to reach customers via various digital technologies. Digital marketing necessarily embodies an extensive selection of product, service and brand marketing tactics that which mainly uses internet as a core and potential medium in addition to mobile and other traditional TV and radio. Today Photo camera giant Canon iMage gateway helps consumers share their digital photos with their friends online, L'Oreal's brand Lancôme uses email newsletters and pitches to get in touch with customers and also tries to strengthen customer brand loyalty aspect. Magazine publishers can also activate and drive their customers into internet with e-mail pitches and SMS messages to improve re-subscription rate.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) opined that marketers increasingly bring brands closer to consumers in everyday life. Also the changing role of customers as co-producers of value is thus becoming increasingly important. Mahapatra and Khan (2009) through their studies remarked that in improving and enhancing the quality of services provided by the business unit's technology plays a vital role. According to Richard Hoge (1993) Electronic marketing (EM) is the transfer of goods and services from seller to buyer involving one or more electronic methods or other such media. He further said that e-marketing began with the use of telegraphs in the nineteenth century. With the invention, innovation and mass acceptance of radio, telephone and cable television electronic media today has become a dominant marketing force. McDonald uses online channel to reinforce brand messages and relationships. In order to cater to various segments they have built online communities for children, such as Happy meal website with educative and other such entertaining games to keep customers always close to themselves. Reinartz and Kumar (2003) through their studies found that number of mailing efforts by the company is positively linked with company's overall profitability over time. Primary advantage of social media marketing however is reducing costs and enhancing the reach. Besides the cost of social media platform is typically lower than marketing platforms such as face to face sales with the help of middlemen or distributors. In addition to this today's social media marketing allows firms to reach customers who may not be accessible due to location and temporal limitations of existing distribution channels. Generally by far the major advantages of social media are that it can enable companies to increase reach and also reduce costs (Watson et.al, Sheth & Sharma 2005). According to Chaffey (2011) opined through their studies that social media marketing necessarily involves encouraging customer communication's on company's own website or through its social presence. In digital marketing companies social media marketing is one such important technique in digital marketing as companies can necessarily use social media form to distribute their messages to their target audience without paying for the publishers or distributor that which is characteristic for traditional marketing. However Digital marketing, e-marketing, electronic marketing and internet marketing as such are all similar terms which simply put refer

to “marketing online whether via websites, online ads, interactive kiosks, opt-in e-mails, interactive TV or mobiles (Chaffey and Smith, **2008**). Giese and Gotey (**2009**) through their studies found out that customer information satisfaction (CIS) for digital marketing as such can be conceptualized as a sum of effective response of varying intensity that which follows consumption and is also stimulated by focal aspects of sales activities, information systems (websites) , customer support, digital product services , after sales service and company culture. Waghmare (2012) necessarily pointed out that many countries in Asia are taking advantage of e-commerce through opening up, which is by far essential for promoting competition and also diffusion of internet technologies. Manish and Zia (**2012**) have found out that currently shoppers in metropolitan India are being driven by e-commerce. These consumers as such are booking travels; buying consumer electronics in metropolitan India already make those purchases online at least once in a month. Dave Chaffey (**2013**) defines e-marketing as application of digital technologies, online channels (web, e-mail, databases, plus mobile/wireless and digital TV) much to contribute to marketing activities aimed at achieving profit acquisition and customer retention (all within a multi channel buying process and customer lifecycle) by virtue of improving customer knowledge base (including their profile, behaviour, value and other such loyalty drivers) and then further delivering integrated communications and other such online services that which matches customers individual needs. Roberts and Kraynak (**2015**) opined that all types of social media provide an opportunity to present company itself or its products to dynamic communities and individuals who may show interest. According to Gurau (**2016**) Online marketing environment as such raises a series of opportunities and also such challenges for social media marketing practitioners.

Major objectives of present study:

The major objective of this research paper is to generally identify the efficiency and effectiveness of digital marketing in the competitive market. Some of the supportive objectives are as follows:

- ❖ To understand various elements of digital marketing
- ❖ To focus on basic comparison between various traditional and digital marketing
- ❖ To discuss various effects of various forms of digital marketing on firm's sales and other such activities
- ❖ To know the various advantages of digital marketing available to customers

Theoretical and conceptual framework associated with present study:

Traditional Marketing versus Digital Marketing: Traditional marketing by far is the most recognizable form of marketing. Traditional marketing is also non-digital way used to promote products and services of business entity. On the other hand, digital marketing is the marketing of products or services using digital channels to reach consumers. Some of the major comparisons are as presented below:

Traditional Marketing	Digital Marketing
Traditional marketing includes print, direct mail, broadcast and telephone	Digital marketing generally includes email marketing, online advertising, text messaging, social media, affiliate marketing, pay per click, search engine optimization
No interaction with the audience	Interaction with the audience
Advertising campaigns are generally planned over a long period of time	Advertising campaigns are generally planned over a short period of time
Results are easy to measure	Results to a greater extent are easy to measure
Quite expensive and time consuming process	Reasonably cheap and rapid way to promote products and services
One campaign prevails for a longer period of time	Campaigns as such can be easily changed with ease and innovations which can be introduced within any campaign

Success of traditional marketing strategies can be celebrated if the firm can reach large local audience	Success of any digital marketing strategies can be celebrated if the firm can reach some specific number of local audiences
Limited reach to customers due to limited number of customer technology	Wider reach to customers because of use of various customer technology
24/7 year round exposure is not possible at times	24/7 year round exposure is possible
No ability to go viral	Larger ability to go viral
One way conversation	Two way conversation
Responses can only occur during work hours only	Responses or feedback can occur anytime

Above table showing traditional marketing and digital marketing comparison

Some of the major advertising mediums that might be used as part of digital marketing strategy of a business could necessarily include promotional efforts made via internet, mobile phones, social media, electronic billboards as well as digital television and radio channels. Digital marketing is also a sub branch of traditional marketing which uses modern digital channels for placement of products which includes downloadable music primarily used for communicating with stakeholders like customers and investors about brand, products and other such business progress.

Various elements of digital marketing:

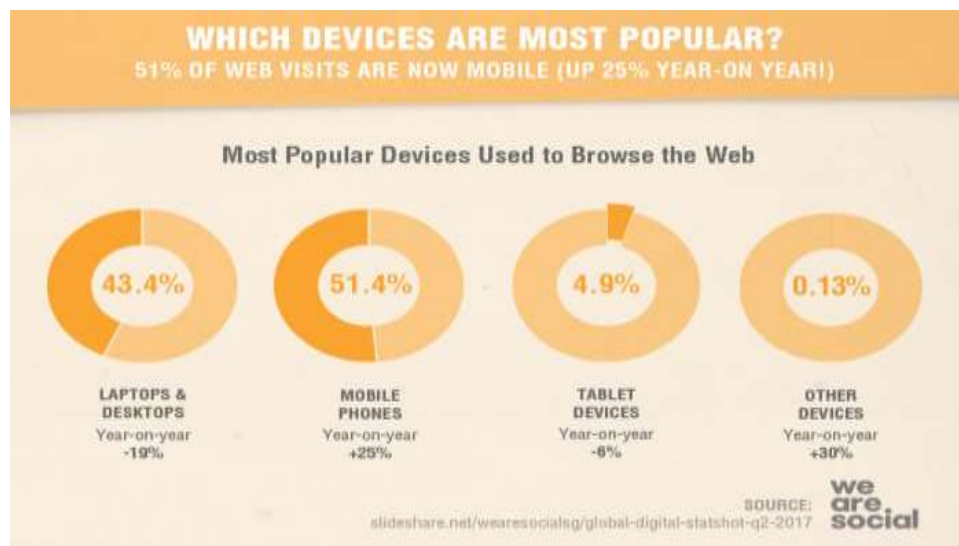
Digital marketing as such is formed from various elements. All major forms operate through electronic devices. Some of the most important elements of digital marketing are given below as follows:

- i. **Email Marketing:** When message about products or services is sent through e-mail to the existing or potential consumer, it is generally defined as email marketing. Direct digital marketing is used to send ads, to build brand and customer loyalty, to build customer trust and also to make brand awareness. Company can generally promote its products and services by using this element of digital marketing easily. It is relatively of low cost compared to advertising or any other forms of media exposure. Company can also bring complete attention of the customer by creating attractive mix of graphics, text and links on products and services
- ii. **Online advertising:** Online advertising certainly plays a very crucial and important part and role in digital marketing. It is called as internet advertising through which company can deliver its message about products or services. Internet based advertising provides content and ads that which best matches to consumer interests. Publishers also put information about their product or services on their websites so that consumers can be benefitted. Advertisers on the outset should place more efficient, effective and relevant ads online. Company controls its budget and also has full control on time through online advertising.
- iii. **Text Messaging:** It is a way to send information about various products and services from cellular and smart phone devices. By using phone devices companies can send information in the form of text, video, pictures or audio (MMS). Marketing through cellphone SMS (Short message service) became increasingly popular in early 2000's in Europe and also some parts of Asia. One can also send order confirmations, shipping alerts using text messages. Using SMS campaigns get faster and also more substantial results. Under this technique, companies can necessarily send marketing messages to their customers in real time, any time and also can be confident that the message will be seen by the customers. Company can also create a questionnaire and also obtain valuable customer feedback which is essential to develop their products or services in future.

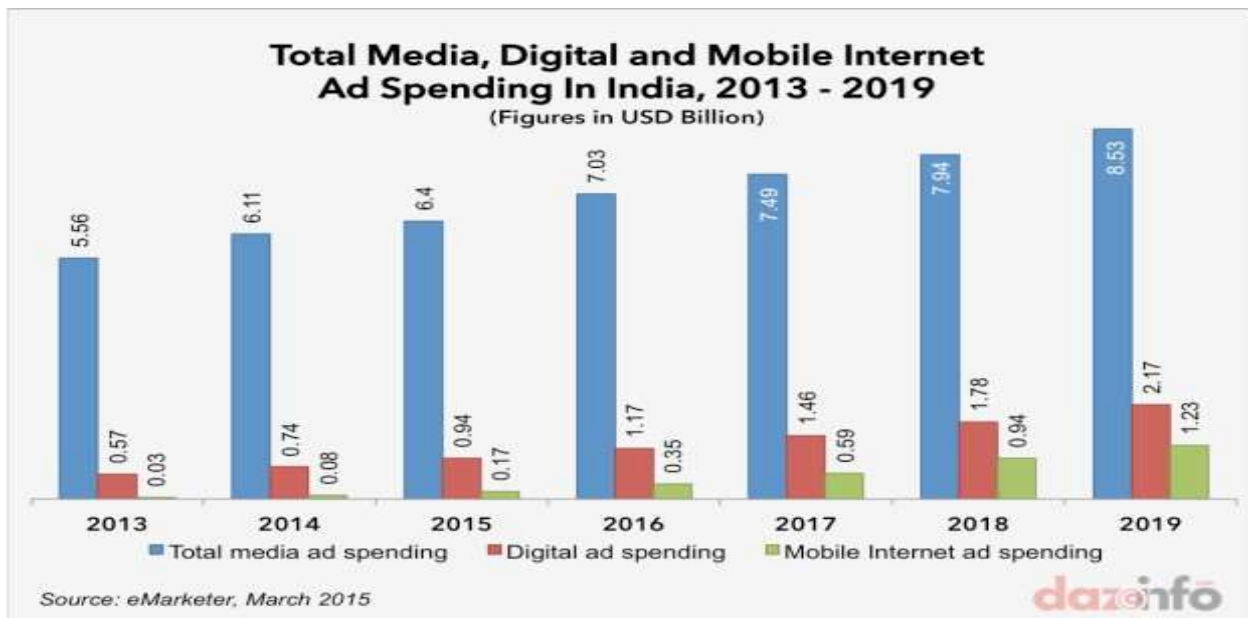
- iv. **Affiliate marketing:** It is a type of performance based marketing wherein a company rewards affiliates for each customer or visitor which they bring by marketing efforts which is created on behalf of their company. Today market has grown in such complexity resulting in emergence of secondary tier of players including affiliate management agencies, super affiliates and specialized third party vendors. Two ways of approaching affiliate marketing are available namely company can offer an affiliate program to others or else it can sign up to be another business affiliate. On the outset if company wants to drive an affiliate program then, company owner has to pay affiliates a commission fee for every lead or sale they drive to company's website. However company's main goal here is to find affiliates who can reach the untapped markets. For instance, a company with an e-zine might become a good affiliate because its subscribers are hungry for resources. Hence introducing one's offer through "trusted" company can grab attention of prospects which might not have otherwise reached.
- v. **Search Engine Optimization (SEO):** It is the process of affecting the visibility or webpage in a search engine's natural or unpaid search results. In general the earlier and more frequently a website appears in the search result list, the more visitors it will receive from search engine users. SEO may also target different kinds of search including that of image search, local search, academic search, video search and news search as well as industry specific vertical search engines.
- vi. **Social Media:** Social media marketing today is one of the most important digital marketing channels. It is generally a computer based tool that which allows people to create, exchange ideas, information and pictures about company's product or services. According to the research conducted by A C Nielsen, internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other such type. Social media marketing networks include Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ etc. Through Facebook company can promote events concerning products and services, also run promotions that which can comply with Facebook guidelines and also explore new opportunities. Companies can

increase their awareness and visibility of their brand through Twitter and it is by far one of the best tools available for the promotion of company's products and other such services. In LinkedIn, Professionals write their profile and then share information with others, companies can also develop their profile in LinkedIn so that professionals can view and also get more information about company's various products and services. Google plus is also one such social media network that is more effective than any other social media like Facebook, Twitter. It is not only simple social media network but also is an authorship tool that which links web content directly with its owner.

- vii. Pay per Click (PPC): Pay per click marketing is one way of using search engine advertising to generate clicks to one's website rather than 'earning' those clicks organically. Pay per click is good for advertisers and searchers. It is also a best way for company's ads since it brings low cost and also greater engagement with its products and services.



Above image showing most popular devices used to browse the web



Above figure showing total Media, Digital and Mobile Internet Ad spending in India
(2013-2019)

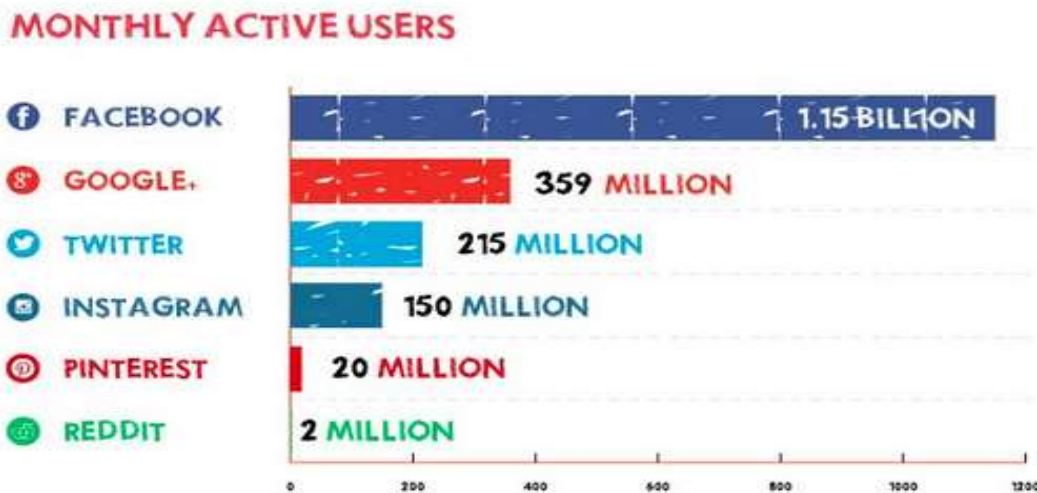


Figure to show Monthly active users of Social networking site in India

Digital India and Digital marketing:

To ensure strongly that government services are made available to citizens electronically by improving online infrastructure by increasing internet connectivity Government of India came up with an initiative called Digital India on July 1st 2015. The major initiative included plans to connect rural areas with high speed internet networks. Digital India as such included three core components namely:

- Creation of digital infrastructure
- Delivering services digitally to all citizens
- Providing digital literacy

Digital India program is indeed ambitious, as there is good scope for the program to succeed. It is however foreseen that Indian citizens can benefit immensely from Digital India program as it will certainly give rise to a number of innovations and other such services in different sector wise industries such as education, healthcare, entertainment, travel and tourism etc

Some of the main functions of a digital agency to enhance digital marketing connectivity are:

- ✚ Adopt new and innovative ideas to help a company stay ahead of its competitors
- ✚ Formulate creative digital marketing campaigns that which helps the company attract maximum attention from its target audience
- ✚ Devise interactive marketing strategies to help a brand create long lasting impression on its target audience
- ✚ Helping a particular business website to achieve higher search engine page rank by targeting the right keyword phrases

Impact of Digital India program by 2019:

- ✓ Broadband in 2.5lakh villages and universal phone connectivity across villages in India
- ✓ Net zero imports by 2020
- ✓ Digital inclusion: 1.7 crore trained for Information technology, telecom and other electronic jobs
- ✓ 4,00,000 public internet access points
- ✓ Wifi connectivity in 2.5 lakh schools, all universities; free public wifi hotspots for citizens
- ✓ E-Governance and E-Services across government sectors
- ✓ Job creation: Direct 1.7 crore and indirect at least 8.5 crore
- ✓ India to be leader in Information technology use in education, banking, services health predicted to overtake China by 2019
- ✓ Digital empowered citizens public cloud, internet access



Figure to show various avenues of digital marketing



Above figure showing major elements of a successful digital marketing strategy

Major advantages and benefits of digital marketing to customers

With rapid technological development and changes, digital marketing off late has changed customers buying behaviour. It has certainly brought in various advantages as well as benefits to customers which are as follows:

1. Stay updated with products as well as services:

Digital marketing technologies certainly allow consumers to stay connected with company information updated. Nowadays lot of consumers can access internet at any place and at anytime and companies are also continuously updating information about their products and services. Digital marketing certainly has the upmost potential to transform the way organizations reach and engage with its customers.

2. Greater engagement:

With Digital marketing avenues consumers can engage with company's various activities. Consumers can also visit company's website, read various information about products or services and also make purchases online and provide feedback. According to Vimeo, 93% of online experiences start with search engine. Before consumers can even know what product or service they need, they are going to look into their search engines to look for pertinent answers to their questions and also to learn more about their challenges.

3. Clear and Precise information about various products and services:

With the help of digital marketing, consumers can certainly get information about various products and services. There is a possibility of chance of misinterpretation of the information obtained from sales person in a retail store. However, internet provides comprehensive and pertinent product information which customers can always rely on and make a effective purchase decision

4. 24/7 Shopping experience:

Since internet is widely available all throughout the day, there is no time restriction for customers who want to buy the products online. Also by creating relevant and engaging content that's optimized for search engines, companies can improve their visibility online and also reach customers when it matters most.

5. Easy comparison of products with others:

Since majority of the companies are trying to promote their products and services using digital marketing, it is by far becoming greatest advantage for the customer in terms that customers can make comparison among products or services by different suppliers in terms of cost and time friendly way. Customers also don't need to visit a number of different retail outlets in order to gain insights and knowledge about various products or services. Over half of all the mobile users are accessing the web from their mobile device. Digital marketing thus can help companies to reach people on mobile devices, tablets and other desktop computers.

6. Apparent Pricing:

Companies show prices of products and services through digital marketing channel and this certainly makes prices very clear and quite transparent for the customers. Companies also regularly change the price or even give special offers on their products or services and customers are always get the advantage by getting informed instantly by just looking at any one means of digital marketing. Business is not just limited to a specific location and companies can use digital marketing to reach their target audiences across the globe. This also allows small businesses to find new audiences for their products and services and also price accordingly.

7. Digital marketing enables instant purchase:

In traditional marketing, customers first watch advertisements and then find relevant physical stores to purchase their needed products or services. However, with digital marketing customers can purchase their products or services instantly. By optimizing the site content for search engines, companies can work to reach more buyers online. Also using relevant keywords that which can help describe product or service offering can certainly help companies bring more targeted traffic to your site, which also increases conversions over time.

Consumers, empowerment, co-production and the implications of digital marketing:

Arguably the most significant impact of digitalization from the consumer perspective has been the level of interaction possible between consumers and businesses and with other consumers as a result of adopting the internet (Palmer *et al.* 2014). As consumers increasingly incorporated the internet into their lives, businesses had to consider whether to mirror the spaces that those consumers now inhabited (Cova and Pace 2006; Rheingold 1993). With the rise of the empowered consumer, businesses and brands became concerned as to their ability to continue to ‘manage’ or direct consumers, as had been possible previously prior to digitalization (Kucuk 2009; Urban 2004). The corporate ‘managing the consumer’ perspective began to be reappraised by some businesses in an effort to evolve the marketing function. The concept of ‘part-time’ marketers, originally coined by Gummesson (1987) in relation to a firm’s employees, can be now extended to the empowered consumers.

Previously, the flow of information had been vertical from producer to consumer, whereas the information flow is now horizontal in nature between consumers themselves, as well as consumers and businesses. Information – its quantity, availability and the way in which consumers search and filter it – has changed with the advent of digitalized information (Nicholas *et al.* 2006). Furthermore, the way in which consumers interact

with information and their subsequent behaviour has altered (Moran *et al.* 2014). While the quantity of information has grown exponentially with digital developments, the filtering of information is often not consciously considered by consumers or businesses. The use of algorithms and predictive analytics to filter search results that are 'personalized' to individual consumers' recent past behaviour or modelled on assumptions made by computers invariably means that information is increasingly filtered. This activity has implications for society and civic life, as consumers and citizens do not act as their own sifters of digital information (Pariser 2011). This pre-filtering might be regarded as a retrograde step by those who initially perceived digitalized information and communication as improving access to information. The democratization of communication was brought about by digitally facilitated peer-to-peer sharing. Digitalization has also facilitated the increasing reliance on peer-to-peer referrals by consumers (Moran *et al.* 2014). Blogs, micro-blogs in the form of Twitter, social networks such as Facebook and Linked-In, review-based communities such as Trip advisor, are all expressions of a desire to share information and experiences. The positive influence of viral marketing and electronic word-of-mouth referrals (eWOM) is acknowledged and sought after by brands (Gupta and Harris 2010; Sweeney *et al.* 2014). The phenomenon of increased choice (within the boundaries of the filters discussed above), brought about by the plethora of information and sharing of this digitalized information, is coupled with the identity- and authenticity-seeking behaviour of the post-modern 'unmanageable' consumer (Gabriel and Lang 2006), as illustrated by the emergence of social shopping to validate potential purchases pre-purchase. The management of user-generated content and negative consumer experiences has become contentious: whether to take issues offline and out of the public glare or whether, in the interests of transparency, to be seen to take a proactive stance in dealing with these problems publicly and gain public approbation for doing so. An implication arising from the shift in consumer behaviour is the subsequent reappraisal by businesses of how to embrace consumer interaction for

mutual benefit, through realigning their marketing strategies. The ability of consumers to interact with businesses across a variety of digital platforms – mobile, tablet, laptop – and the growth of consumer-generated material on these platforms, created the potential for businesses and brands to use consumer-generated content beyond incorporating testimonials. Using consumer insight and creativity to develop new products and concepts is not uniquely tied to the advent of the internet, but the extent of the use of co-creation is (Hoyer *et al.* 2010). Interestingly, critical marketers are now questioning whether this co-creation is just another form of governing consumers by offering rewards (often inadequate compared to the commercial gain for the companies) for pro-brand creative activity (Cova and Dall'Aglio 2009; Cova *et al.* 2011; Wilmott 2010).

Concluding remarks and further proposal:

Today digital channel in marketing has certainly become an essential part of strategy for many companies. Nowadays even for small business owners there is quite a price effective and efficient way to market his/her products or services. Digital marketing as such has no boundaries. Company can use any devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, televisions, game consoles, digital billboards and hoardings, media such as social media, SEO (Search engine optimization), video content, email pitches and lot more to promote itself and also its products and services. Digital marketing in near future may succeed more if it considers users' needs as a top priority. Just like the proverb goes "Rome was not built in a day" so as digital marketing results which won't also come without any major attempt, without any trial and error. Thus the watchwords 'test, learn and evolve' should certainly be at the heart of all major digital marketing initiatives. Companies should also create innovative customer experiences and specific strategies for media to identify the best path for driving up the digital marketing performance. Thus it's very much important to have a sound and profound marketing strategy before it jumps into creating and distributing content or launching digital ad campaigns. Company should also consider its overall business goals and then create digital marketing goals that which

can align with its objectives. Finally it can be interpreted that traditional marketing tactics like print advertising are quite expensive and requires big business budgets for effective placement. However digital marketing tactics are more affordable, allowing businesses of all sizes to gain exposure online.

There has been an exciting journey to date, as marketing strives to embrace the promise of digital, with some trying moments along the way. This paper has identified the milestones and points of interest, suggesting where challenges remain for the next stage of this trek. Arguably, failure to heed the resulting warnings will impede marketing's ability to harness fully the benefits of digital and to counteract effectively the associated negative consequences of a digitally enabled marketplace. There are challenges and inherent risks, but digitalization of marketing provides new routes to markets, new approaches to communication and brand-building, new opportunities for relationship development, new options for product development, trialling new pricing models, new sources of data, and the platform for innovation – but only if business leadership teams and their marketers appreciate the step-change necessary to embrace digital and seek to keep up with the pace on the next stages of the onward journey.

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