

Review

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The Role of Social Media in Digital Marketing: Effects, Strategies, and Future Research Directions

Kexue Yan ^{1,*}, Thanakon Ratchatakulpat ¹ and Anong Taiwan ¹

¹ Faculty of Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon, 10300, Thailand

* Correspondence: Kexue Yan, Faculty of Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon, 10300, Thailand

Abstract: Social media has revolutionized communication by enabling rapid sharing and interaction, while simultaneously fostering personal and community online identities. It has the potential to reach vast audiences, effectively promoting brands, products, and services, attracting potential customers, and driving sales. Moreover, social media accelerates changes in the shared environment between businesses and consumers, influencing market behavior. Through a literature review integrated with the digital marketing research framework, this study categorizes and synthesizes key findings from existing research. It identifies critical touchpoints where social media exerts or could exert a significant influence on marketing processes and strategies. The study also outlines the evolving role of social media in digital marketing and suggests directions for future research in this field.

Keywords: digital marketing; social media; literature review

1. Introduction

Marketing plays a crucial role in the success and growth of any business. As technological advancements and societal changes continue to reshape the landscape, marketing strategies are constantly evolving to keep pace with new trends and consumer demands. Over the past decade, social media marketing has emerged as a dominant force, revolutionizing how brands interact with consumers, and this trend shows no sign of slowing down [1]. In this dynamic environment, brands are increasingly focusing on enhancing the user experience and addressing personalized needs. By offering customized products and services, companies can foster deeper engagement with their customers, creating lasting relationships that drive loyalty and sales.

As businesses strive to stay competitive, it is essential to remain responsive to emerging marketing channels and techniques. Social media marketing, in particular, has proven to be an invaluable tool for brands aiming to amplify their reach and influence. With its vast reach and interactive nature, social media platforms enable businesses to engage directly with consumers, share content, and promote products in innovative ways. Social media not only provides an efficient means of information dissemination but also empowers consumers to participate in interactive dialogues, strengthening the connection between brands and their audience. Key functions such as content creation, consumer interaction, advertising, search, and sales make social media a multifaceted tool in digital marketing [2]. As these platforms continue to evolve, they present brands with unique

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opportunities to engage customers, drive conversions, and stay at the forefront of the digital marketing landscape.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. Marketing

The reorganization of General Electric Company in the early 1950s marked a pivotal moment in the emergence of a corporate philosophy that later became known as the marketing concept [3]. This approach was hailed as a groundbreaking development in corporate strategy, gaining widespread acclaim as a new frontier in business practice. Over time, however, it also attracted significant scrutiny, with debates surrounding its validity emerging both in business and academic spheres [4]. The marketing concept can be succinctly defined as the belief that an organization can best serve both its own interests and those of its customers by achieving a balance that addresses the needs of both parties [5].

2.2. Digital Marketing

Chaffey et al. define digital marketing as the application of digital media, data, and technology to achieve marketing objectives [6]. *The Financial Times* characterizes digital marketing as the use of digital channels to engage consumers in the promotion of products or services. According to the American Marketing Association, digital marketing involves the creation, communication, and delivery of value to customers and other stakeholders through digital technologies [7]. Kannan and Li offer a broader definition, describing digital marketing as an adaptive, technology-driven process in which companies collaborate with customers and partners to co-create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders [8]. Drawing from these perspectives, this article defines digital marketing as an evolving, technology-driven process that revolves around the creation, communication, delivery, and maintenance of value for both customers and businesses. It is shaped by continuously advancing technologies and data accumulation, influencing market behavior and driving business-consumer interactions, a concept further illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The framework for research in digital marketing.

Online Marketing Mix Factors	Behavior of Purchasing Decisions Smartphone Products through Digital Channels
Product	Problem/Need Recognition
Price	Information Search
Place	Evaluation of Alternatives
Promotion	Purchase Decision
Privacy	Post Purchase Behavior
Personalization	

2.3. Social Media

Social media serves as a dynamic tool and platform that facilitates communication, sharing, and dissemination of information among individuals. As an online medium, it provides users with significant autonomy and control, enabling them to engage and interact within a flexible space [8]. The defining characteristics of social media include participation, openness, communication, community-building, and connectivity. These features reflect the increasingly intertwined development of technology, business, and data, which collectively drive changes in how users live, socialize, and entertain themselves. Social media platforms have evolved significantly over time, progressing from early forms such as blogs and forums in the Web 1.0 era, to more sophisticated mobile social networking tools like Weibo, WeChat, and live streaming platforms. Today, the rise of content

communities and social media 3.0 has further transformed the landscape, with social applications becoming an integral part of daily life [9].

The evolution of social media is inextricably linked to user behavior, as each stage of development is shaped by increasing engagement and interaction. In particular, brand marketing communication on social media platforms has proven to be highly impactful, with the potential to attract massive attention in a short time. The power of social media lies in its ability to create explosive momentum, drawing substantial focus to specific events or content almost instantaneously. Users, often enthusiastic about participating and sharing, are quick to spread information, which leads to a rapid dissemination of content. This process is amplified by mobile platforms, enabling viral spread across various channels and creating a ripple effect through both online interactions and offline word-of-mouth. Consequently, social media has become a powerful and efficient tool for brand marketing, harnessing user-generated content, attention, and shared experiences to drive rapid visibility and engagement.

2.4. Networking Services

Table 2 presents a list of the most widely used social networking services, ranked according to the number of active users as of January 2024, based on data from Statista.

Table 2. Social networking services with the most users, January 2024.

No.	Network Name	Number of Users (in Millions)	Country of Origin
1	Facebook	2910	United States
2	YouTube	2562	United States
3	WhatsApp	2000	United States
4	Instagram	1478	United States
5	WeChat	1263	China
6	TikTok	1000	China
7	Facebook Messenger	988	United States
8	Douyin	600	China

2.5. Six Degrees of Separation

In 1967, Stanley Milgram, a psychologist at Harvard University, conducted a landmark experiment known as the "chain letter" experiment. Milgram randomly sent a letter to 160 individuals in Nebraska, located in the Midwestern United States, containing the name of an ordinary stockbroker in Boston, thousands of miles away. He instructed the recipients to forward the letter to the stockbroker through their personal contacts. Remarkably, most of the letters reached the stockbroker in just five or six steps. This experiment led to the development of the "six degrees of separation" theory, which posits that all socialized members of modern society can be connected through a chain of six intermediaries [10]. This concept laid the theoretical foundation for the structure of social networks, demonstrating that even seemingly unrelated individuals can be linked through a small number of connections.

The evolution of social media can be traced back to the inception of Usenet in 1982, an early discussion forum system that provided a platform for users to publish and exchange information. In 1997, Six Degrees, the first social networking site, emerged, allowing users to connect with friends and family, thus pioneering the modern concept of social networking platforms.

In the 21st century, social media experienced rapid and exponential growth. Facebook, launched in 2004, quickly rose to prominence, becoming the world's leading social

media platform [10]. The advent of YouTube in 2005 revolutionized the way people consumed and shared video content. In 2006, Twitter introduced a platform for real-time, short-form communication, further transforming the landscape of online interaction.

As time progresses, social media continues to innovate and evolve, with new platforms emerging and established ones regularly introducing new features to meet changing user demands. Figure 1 shows the timeline of social media. Today, social media has become an integral part of daily life and plays a critical role in the marketing strategies of businesses worldwide.

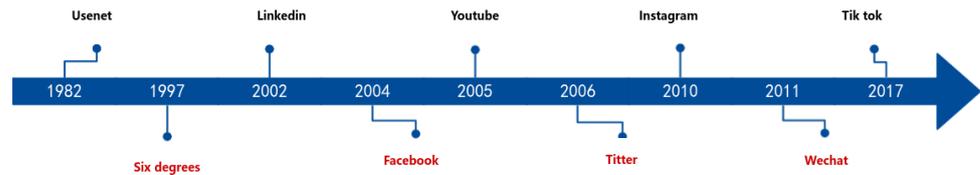


Figure 1. Social media timeline.

3. Results and Discussion

The literature review process in this article integrates the three key stages of an effective literature review methodology alongside the literature search process, as depicted in Figure 2. Additionally, research in social media marketing is inherently interdisciplinary [2]. Investigations in digital marketing often give rise to foundational questions that may be addressed through insights from various fields, including consumer psychology, marketing analysis, economics, and communication. This article aims to objectively capture the significant advancements in substantive research on social media within digital marketing, utilizing a wide range of comprehensive and representative databases.

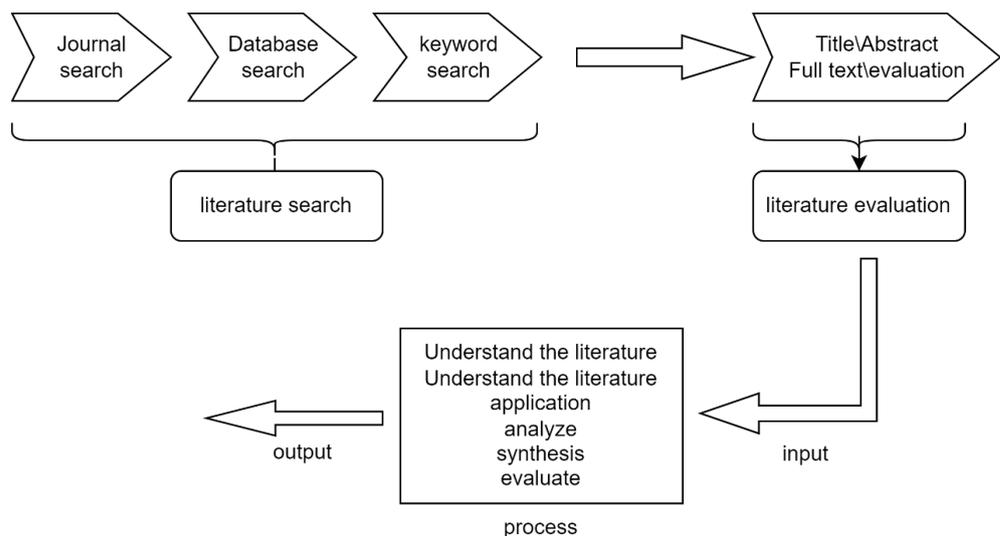


Figure 2. Literature search process.

In line with the literature search process, this article consulted seven relevant academic journals: *Marketing Science*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. A pertinent paper was obtained from *Marketing Science*. Additionally, multidisciplinary literature databases were selected to ensure the reliability and validity of the search results, including EBSCOhost, Elsevier

(ScienceDirect), ProQuest, and Google Scholar. The primary search utilized the keywords "social media" and "marketing," with supplementary terms added to refine the scope of the query due to the large volume of search results. The search focused on articles published within the last three years. Specifically, a query on ProQuest identified 64 scholarly articles, and after a preliminary screening, 41 relevant articles were retained. Using a similar search and evaluation methodology, Google Scholar provided 35 articles, JSTOR yielded 15 articles, Wiley Online Library maintained 24 articles, and ScienceDirect preserved 47 articles (Table 3).

Table 3. Literature search results.

Database	Title (Marketing and Social Media)	Delete Irrelevant	Remove Duplicates	Result
ProQuest	64	12	11	41
Google Scholar	78	23	20	35
JSTOR	30	6	9	15
Wiley Online Library	26	5	7	24
ScienceDirect	69	13	9	47
Final Results				162

The process involves extracting meaningful information from relevant documents through methods such as listing, defining, describing, and identifying key concepts. This information is then synthesized and evaluated through activities such as summarizing, distinguishing, explaining, and comparing, in order to understand its significance and relevance. Following Kannan's research framework, the concepts related to the topic are deconstructed into distinct units. Subsequently, highly relevant preliminary studies and research agendas are compiled, discussed, integrated, and analyzed to generate insightful questions for future research. The resulting materials are revised based on feedback from expert reviews, and this iterative process is repeated to refine and enhance the research output.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Modern social media, supported by advanced digital technologies, has evolved into a dynamic network interaction platform that functions as a virtual community space for public content creation, information sharing, opinion exchange, viewpoint articulation, and experience sharing [11]. Within the realm of digital marketing, the strategic deployment of social media serves as a crucial link connecting the macro environment, corporate entities, and marketing effectiveness, thereby constructing a multi-dimensional, dynamic, and interdependent marketing ecosystem. Within this integrated framework, the interactions and influences between various elements collectively drive the realization of marketing objectives and the creation of market value.

In today's marketing landscape, digital marketing, particularly social media—occupies a central role, signaling a shift toward a customer-centric approach [4]. This environment is characterized by collaborative interactions between brands, consumers, competitors, and content creators, fostering a more interconnected and participatory model of engagement.

4.1. Social Media Create a Customer-Centric, Multi-Element Marketing Environment

Social media has fundamentally transformed the way brands engage with their audiences, establishing a two-way communication channel that allows customers to move beyond being passive recipients to become active participants in the marketing narrative [12]. This participatory approach has fostered the emergence of user-generated content,

where consumers contribute to the creation of marketing materials, often blurring the distinction between consumers and content creators.

Competitors within this space also play a significant role. The transparent nature of digital platforms enables brands to observe and learn from each other's strategies, contributing to a more dynamic and rapidly evolving marketing ecosystem. This competitive observation frequently results in the cross-pollination of ideas, where successful strategies are adapted and refined across various brands.

In digital marketing, content has become paramount, shifting the focus from traditional advertising to the creation of engaging, relevant, and valuable content [13]. This content is not only designed to sell and inform but also to entertain and foster deeper connections with the audience. The ultimate goal is to build lasting relationships with consumers, transforming them from mere customers into brand advocates.

In conclusion, the modern marketing landscape is intricately connected with digital platforms, particularly social media. It emphasizes customer engagement, co-creation with both consumers and competitors, and the production of meaningful content—key elements that are essential for developing an effective digital marketing strategy.

4.2. Social Media Organically Connects Market Research and Product Sales

As consumer expectations for products and services continue to rise, addressing individualized user needs has become a critical aspect of modern marketing. Consumers are increasingly demanding personalized products and services, signaling that brands must place greater emphasis on understanding and responding to individual preferences by offering tailored solutions.

Brands are tasked with gaining a deep understanding of consumer desires and behaviors through market research and data analysis. This insight enables them to develop products and services that meet the diverse needs of their customers. Furthermore, enhancing the user experience through personalized recommendations and services is essential for fostering customer loyalty and encouraging positive word-of-mouth.

For brands, achieving higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty not only drives sales and profits but also enhances their competitive advantage and market position. The widespread adoption of internet technology and the increased transparency of information have empowered consumers with greater access to knowledge and options. As a result, they can easily compare different brands and products to identify those that best meet their needs. This transparency has heightened consumers' emphasis on value for money and product quality.

Societal development and diversification have contributed to the emergence of varied lifestyles, cultural backgrounds, and social values, leading consumers to expect brands to recognize and address their unique needs. Consequently, brands must remain attuned to the diverse cultures, lifestyles, and preferences of their consumers, providing targeted services and personalized experiences that cater to these varied demands.

Brands face both possibilities and challenges as technology and digitalization advance [14]. Data analysis and artificial intelligence allow brands to better understand consumer behavior and wants, resulting in more tailored service and experience offers. Platforms such as social media and mobile applications make it easier for customers to share their preferences and feedback [15], allowing firms to provide more tailored products and services.

For brands, the growing consumer need for customisation offers both difficulty and an opportunity. Brands must recognize and actively address these individualized demands if they hope to gain the confidence and loyalty of consumers. A brand's long-term growth and development depends on its ability to continuously adapt to these changing needs.

4.3. Social Media have Transformed the Market Landscape, Providing Customers with Platforms to Engage Directly with Brands.

Consumer engagement plays a vital role in enhancing customer involvement, satisfaction, purchase intention, and, ultimately, the sales performance of a company's products. The rapid growth and widespread adoption of social networks have facilitated more direct and meaningful interactions between brands and users [16]. Through platforms such as social media, brands can gain valuable insights into consumer needs and feedback, enabling them to provide more personalized services and tailored experiences that resonate with individual preferences.

This increased level of interaction not only boosts brand awareness and influence but also contributes to the development of a positive brand image and reputation. Engaging with consumers in a responsive and personalized manner attracts potential customers while nurturing existing ones, fostering greater trust and loyalty between brands and consumers. When brands actively interact with their audience—addressing their concerns, needs, and feedback with customized, user-friendly services—consumers feel acknowledged and valued. This emotional connection can significantly enhance their willingness to make purchases, increasing both their propensity to buy and their likelihood of becoming long-term, loyal users of the brand. Thus, engagement serves as a powerful driver in cultivating both customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

However, the relationship between brands and users must be carefully planned in terms of timing and frequency. Brands should communicate with people at appropriate intervals to avoid excessive promotion or invading their life, which may result in negative perceptions [17]. Furthermore, paying close attention to user feedback and assessments is critical because it requires ongoing refining and optimization of products and services to improve user happiness and build loyalty.

Interactions with consumers provide brands with significant insights into consumer requirements and preferences, allowing them to fine-tune their services accordingly. Collecting feedback from consumers through social media and other communication channels is crucial for understanding their evaluations and suggestions, which helps improve products and services and so improves the entire user experience.

In conclusion, the increased interaction between brands and users marks a defining characteristic of marketing in the social network era. Brands must engage with consumers through a variety of channels, providing personalized and timely services, building a positive brand image and reputation, and leveraging interactions to gain a deeper understanding of consumer needs and feedback. This approach is vital for optimizing products and services, ultimately boosting user satisfaction and fostering long-term brand loyalty.

5. Future Research Directions

5.1. Optimization and Innovation in Video Content

The growing prominence of short videos and live streaming has made video content an integral component of social media marketing. Brands must focus on developing high-quality, engaging, and compelling video content that can both attract and retain their target audiences. At the same time, there is a pressing need to innovate with new video formats and creative techniques, including the integration of technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) within video marketing strategies [18]. Such innovation is critical for brands to remain competitive and relevant in the rapidly evolving digital marketing landscape, ensuring effective audience engagement in a highly dynamic and technology-driven market environment.

5.2. Artificial Intelligence and Data-Driven Marketing Strategies

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data technologies has significantly broadened the scope of social media marketing [19]. These technologies enable brands to analyze user data, gaining valuable insights into user interests, preferences, and

behaviors, which allows for the development of more accurate and personalized marketing strategies. Additionally, AI can be utilized to automate various marketing processes, thereby improving both the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing efforts. These technological innovations are reshaping the marketing landscape, providing advanced tools that allow brands to engage with their audiences in a more targeted and impactful way. Consequently, AI and data-driven approaches have become essential components of the strategic framework for contemporary marketers [20].

5.3. Integration and Development of Social E-Commerce

Social e-commerce has emerged as an innovative model that merges social media with online shopping, offering users a more personalized and convenient shopping experience. Brands must focus on exploring effective methods for integrating social media platforms with e-commerce systems to deliver a seamless shopping experience. This integration is critical for boosting user engagement and improving satisfaction. Additionally, there is a need to examine new models within social e-commerce, which requires an understanding of shifting consumer behaviors and preferences in the digital marketplace. Developing creative strategies in this area is essential for brands to stay competitive and relevant in an increasingly digital world. The fusion of social media and e-commerce represents a fundamental change in consumer purchasing patterns, demanding a strategic response from brands to capitalize on this emerging trend [21].

5.4. Cross-Platform Integrated Communication

As social media platforms continue to diversify and fragment, the challenge of cross-platform marketing and integrated communications has become increasingly significant for brands. It is essential for brands to explore how to effectively implement cross-platform marketing strategies across various social media platforms, ensuring that brand messaging remains consistent and synergistic. Achieving this requires a comprehensive understanding of the unique characteristics and user demographics of each platform, allowing brands to tailor their communications accordingly. The objective is to establish a unified brand narrative that resonates across multiple channels, thereby maximizing reach and impact. Effective marketing and integrated communication strategies are vital for brands to sustain a strong and consistent presence in the competitive digital marketing landscape.

5.5. Innovation and Optimization of Social Media Advertising

Social media advertising plays a crucial role in social media marketing. To enhance click-through and conversion rates, brands must conduct in-depth research into creating compelling and effective advertisements. This requires a thorough understanding of the target audience's preferences, behaviors, and the unique characteristics of different social media platforms. Furthermore, there is a need to explore innovative advertising formats and strategies, such as native advertising and programmatic buying. These approaches involve seamlessly integrating advertisements into the user's social media experience, while employing data-driven techniques to optimize ad placements.

Exploring these new formats and strategies is essential in the rapidly evolving digital landscape, where traditional advertising methods may no longer be sufficient. By innovating and optimizing social media ads, brands can effectively capture user attention, increase engagement, and drive the desired marketing outcomes in a competitive digital space.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, recent studies in social media marketing primarily focus on the optimization and innovation of video content, the application of artificial intelligence and data-driven marketing strategies, the integration and development of social e-commerce,

cross-platform marketing, and improvements in social media advertising. These research areas are vital for brands looking to effectively leverage social media for marketing, ultimately leading to enhanced marketing results. This research is invaluable for brands aiming to adapt and thrive in the ever-changing digital marketing landscape, highlighting the need to stay informed about technological advancements and emerging consumer behavior trends. To fully capitalize on social media's potential, brands must continuously explore and understand these key areas.

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