

USING DIGITAL MARKETING AS MEANS OF COMMUNICATION – WITH REFERENCE TO CHILDREN'S AUDIENCE

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Abstract

The last three decades have brought with them a huge development of information technology and communications, and the emergence and proliferation of the Internet has made possible the creation of complex global networks of communication and collaboration. These new technologies have transformed the way we learn, communicate and work - they have fundamentally transformed the way we live. This evolution has brought with it various economic and social opportunities and benefits, but also the emergence of new challenges. One of these challenges is that, although the Internet was not designed focused on children, some of the most of its users are them.

In a society where technology develops daily and children have access to digital devices at a very young age, it is imperative to adapt to the new challenges of developing children's cognitive and socio-emotional skills, as they have specific needs and vulnerabilities that must be recognized.

Keywords: internet, digital marketing, communication, digital devices.

JEL Classification: M19, M21, O31, O49

1. Introduction

Digital marketing is the promotion and sale of products and services using online strategies [12]. This activity is constantly developing according to the habits of Internet users. Therefore, online users must be known well: what they do, what their habits are and what interests they have. This is precisely one of the main advantages of digital marketing compared to classic promotional activities; with the new technologies and information available, we can properly filter the audience to reach the target group. This is also the premise of a successful business.

Thus, using key performance indicators (KPIs) for digital marketing, marketers can understand what marketing strategies to develop and how well they are working. This

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fosters continuous improvement of organizations, driving customer engagement and optimizing the return on marketing investment.

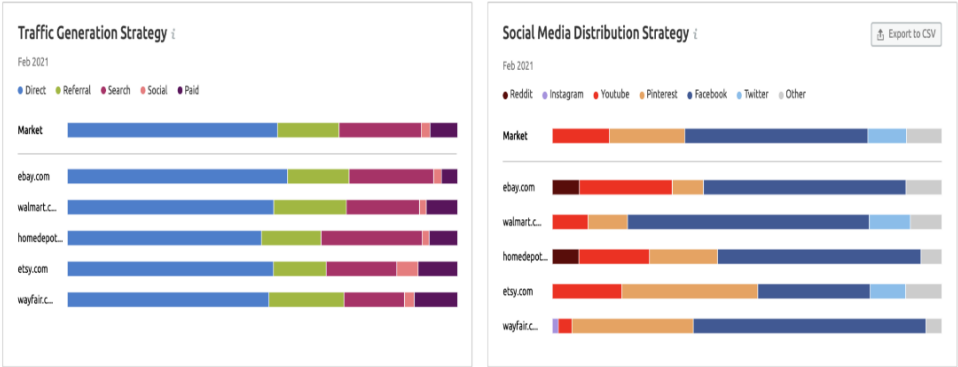


Figure 1. Traffic generation strategy vs social media distribution strategy³

Digital marketing strategies foster direct communication between business and customers while those customers follow unique paths to purchase. Innovative marketers use digital marketing to deliver the right content and offers at the right time, on the channels where customers spend most of their time. When it is leveraged correctly, digital marketing is beneficial for both customers and business; by properly personalizing content and offers for each individual, customers feel that the brand understands their needs and can provide them a valuable product.

There are several available digital marketing channels, such as [7]:

- *Affiliate marketing* is the business promotion within the partner affiliate network. It is applicable when a product is marketed within that network; the products are recommended (or they are sold freely) by the partner sites.



Figure 2. How does affiliate marketing work⁴

³ Source: Semrush - Online Marketing Can Be Easy

⁴ Source: <https://www.digitalmarketing.org/>

- *Search Engine Marketing* - (SEM) is a type of marketing on the Internet which involves promoting websites by increasing their visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs) primarily through paid advertising. SEM may include search engine optimization, which adjusts or rewrites site content and site architecture to rank higher in search engine results pages to improve pay-per-click (PPC) listings.
- *Social Media Marketing* – the use of social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Google+ etc.) in order to market a product or a service. It is a procedure where strategies are made and executed to drive traffic for a website or to gain the attention of buyers on the web using various social media platforms.
- *Content Marketing* – this is a marketing approach which focuses on earning and keeping customers by offering useful content, it improves the buying experience and generates brand knowledge and recognition. Any brand can use this approach in order to draw customer attention aiming to influence the buying decision.



Figure 3. Content strategy⁵

- *Sponsored content* – is using the created and paid content of a brand in order to promote a product or a service.
- *SMS Marketing* –even if its popularity is constantly decreasing, SMS marketing is still playing an important part in earning new customers, offering updates or new products, etc.
- *SEO - Search Engine Optimization* - are the activities that help a certain site rank as well as possible in Internet searches. This means that the position in Google will depend a lot on the optimization of the site.

⁵ Source: Sursa: <https://www.digitalmarketing.org/>



Figure 4.SEO⁶

- *PPC - (Pay-per-Click)* is the form of digital advertising that pays for the number of clicks from users interested in the advertising solution. The ad can be a sponsored post, link, or poster that tells the user to take a specific action. Thus, the user is offered access to the e-commerce site, presentations on social networks, watch video content, etc. For this kind of digital advertising, Google Ads and Facebook Ads are primarily used.
- *E-mail Marketing* – is one of the most efficient (and cheap) promotion strategies; there are different types of e-mails: inviting to subscribe to a newsletter, seasonal promotions, announcements of discounts and special offers within the loyalty program or thank you emails after purchasing or registration.



Figure 5.E-mail marketing⁷

It is important that the company reaches customers and create a bidirectional communication pattern, because digital marketing enables customers to provide feedback to the company on a community-based site or directly to the company via email. Companies

⁶ Source: <https://www.digitalmarketing.org/>

⁷ Source: <https://smarters.ro/>

should seek this long-term communication relationship by using multiple forms of channels and using promotional strategies related to the target consumer as well as word of mouth marketing.

After all, this boosts their confidence and turns them into loyal brand advocates. Digital marketing is also very advantageous for companies, offering:

- **Extended coverage.** Most people start the buying process online, on various digital channels.
- **Precise targeting.** Marketers can reach more qualified buyers by leveraging SEO and social media strategies. In turn, this drives conversions, revenue, and brand promotion.
- **Agility.** It's usually easier to adjust your digital marketing strategies if your goals change.
- **Measurability.** Digital marketing offers a greater degree of attribution, so marketers know which strategies are really driving growth.

2. Technology innovations and the impact of overuse by children

If the audience is made up of children, a number of issues should be considered on several levels. Digital marketing is designed to create addiction for children and extract data; attempts to influence behavior, emotional responses, and preferences. It is also designed to target very specifically, what increases children's vulnerability. It's about entertainment and emotion, so digital marketing can be used to create a connection between an emotion and a brand name in ways we don't realize, the techniques being subliminal [7].

Companies are using more and more digital channels in order to market products to children.

Children that are now teenagers have been born in a digital world. It is a world where they spend a lot of time, considering the Internet opportunities in accessing knowledge, communication and participation; the benefits of its accessing can have an impact in developing the skills necessary for the XXI-st century, but also the extended scope of risks and dangers to which children can be exposed. It is known that children have specific needs and vulnerabilities that must be recognized. Relevant in this sense is the study done in 2018 by the Save the Children Organization - *Romania, entitled Study regarding the use of the Internet by children*, the main conclusions being [13]:

- the average age that children start spending time online is 9 years old; the age that children start accessing the Internet describes a declining trend;
- 96,1% of children are accessing Internet by smart phone ; 99,3% of them declare that they have a profile on a social network;

- the most popular social networks amongst children are Facebook (95,9%), Youtube (90,5%) and Instagram (81,4%);
- 27% of the respondents say that on a typical school day they spend 6+ hours online or constantly check their browsing device;
- referring to the time spent on the Internet, 40% of children say that it happens very often or quite often that they surf the web without a specific purpose, 31% say they spent less time with family or doing things for school in order to surf the Internet and 28% say they tried unsuccessfully to spend less time online;
- almost 13% of children say that it happened very often that they did not eat or sleep in order to be online and 23% did not feel at ease when they could not stay on the Internet
- the online environment is the main source of information for the responding children, 47.6% of the children state that they sometimes, rarely or never check the truth value of the information read online
- 73% of the responding children say that they use the Internet at school; 87.4% of children state that they spend time online during breaks and 40% that they do it, secretly, during class hours;
- 63.5% of respondents state that they play online; most children (79.9%) say they play online because it's fun or to relax (60.6%), and 45.2% say they do it because they are bored.

In a society where technology evolves daily and children have access to digital devices starting at a very young age, it is imperative to adapt to new challenges in terms of developing children's cognitive and socio-emotional skills, and this study aims to bring more information about how children use the Internet. At the same time, it wants to provide a clearer picture of the impact of new technologies on the emotional well-being of children.

Digital life, including children's, produces a huge amount of data about preferences, habits, desires and fears, which is collected by public and private entities. This creates new opportunities to deliver personalized and targeted information and advertising.

Online advertising can be based on the content a user views (contextual advertising) or based on their individual profile (online behavioral advertising). This profile is often created by "cookies", files placed on a user's device to monitor their preferences and behavior - some of which can never be removed.

Many people also choose to actively participate in online marketing and enjoy it. Users like or share content such as videos and games from brands they identify with. Interactive content is particularly popular.

Protecting children from digital marketing requires a series of actions at EU level, in this regard, in October 2017, a "declaration on digital health societies" was launched during the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU. It contains some concepts that can help: citizen control of data, good governance, the need for all EU countries to take a responsible role, including the protecting of the citizens' personal data.

The use of the Internet by children and young people in a creative, useful and safe way should be a permanent concern of all the factors involved (authorities/family); at the same time, the child must be trained in the use of modern information and online communication technologies, with an emphasis on awareness and prevention of dangers on the Internet. In this direction, specialists have warned about the effects - which can be felt for life - of children's excessive use of social networks. [8]

Thus, a first point emphasized is that Facebook and other similar sites infantilize the brain that is attracted to loud noises and bright lights, that has a limited attention span and lives only for the present moment. Participating in such social networks hardly involves any kind of concentration skills, and this fact trains the brain to develop only a limited field of attention.

A second important point is that children no longer learn to communicate in the real world. There are many testimonies from some teachers that state that social media affects children's understanding levels. Also, if children communicate primarily through the screen, they will not be able to learn the subtleties of real-life communication – such as body language, voice tone and inflections, and understanding beyond words.

A third aspect is that social media makes children more self-centered. As Facebook and other sites allow children to create their own page that is just about them, this leads more vulnerable children to think and believe that the world spins around them - which is a starter to the emotional problems they will face later in life.

Fourth, these sites make children—just like tabloids, TV shows, and a large part of the mass media in general—avid for the sensational.

Finally, pediatricians have noticed that some teenagers suffer from the so-called "Facebook depression". After spending a lot of time on Facebook and other popular social networking sites, some teenagers become anxious and moody, irritable, indisposed.

Also, the vulnerable teenager may suffer depression when he reads on his friends' Facebook pages what "wonderful" things are happening to them, while - by comparison - his own life does not seem so great. Teens who suffer from "Facebook depression" generally have trouble with social interactions, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. [15]

Here can be added narcissism and its connection with another phenomenon represented by the selfie photo trend. A teenager may have thousands of virtual friends, countless likes, a hero in the virtual world, but all this is worth nothing in real life, in a real community; behind the selfie trend [3] hiding, in fact, there is a psychological weakness. Most of them

are self-obsessed youth [9] who have a permanent and childish need for appreciation from others and regarding computer games, they could lead to a low level of concentration, a need for immediate gratification and maybe affect non-verbal skills, such as maintaining eye contact during a conversation.

In order to be effective in real life, real experiences are needed. People who are online on the Internet all day lack this ability to adapt to new situations, having a low emotional intelligence. The lack of experience makes the world an unknown, therefore it can be scary - people can no longer stand to be in a community, to talk face to face, because they lack the ability to emotionally manage the moment. Frustrations, irascibility, aggressive behavior can appear from here.

Specialists from several fields Andrew Weil [1] - researcher and doctor from the USA or Francis Heylighen [2], cybernetician at the Free University of Brussels, draw attention to the fact that information addiction causes depression; the modern flow of information is useless. The huge amount of data produced on a daily basis effectively chokes our brain and the torrent of data characteristic of the contemporary age becomes, in their opinion, "informational smog". Most of these so-called crucial pieces of information are truncated, decontextualized and misinterpreted pieces of information. This means that they serve us absolutely nothing.

Nowadays, there is more and more value based on intelligence, understanding things or technical skills - those of the mind. In his book *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman [5] collected the results of decades of research on intelligence, reaching the conclusion that we have a general tendency to underestimate the importance of social and emotional skills.

In the long run, there are much better predictors than IQ, so Goleman underlines the dramatic decline in "emotional competence" over the past two decades — what some researchers have named the "emotional deficiency disease."

In the United States, where most of the research has been conducted, on average, children showed a declining level of emotional skills on no less than 40 indicators of emotional and social well-being (between mid the seventh decade and the end of the eighth decade of the 20th century). These findings are worrying given that Goleman attests that IQ (intelligence quotient) contributes only about 20% to financial and personal success; the remaining 80% strongly depends on socio-emotional skills.

This study and many others clearly demonstrate that, beyond IQ, there are factors associated with effective mental skills. An important cause of the decline of these skills is precisely the fact that more and more children spend more and more time in front of the TV or computer, distancing themselves from other children and even from their parents, and most of the emotional skills are not learned alone but through interaction with other people.

Many employers in technical or financial professions around the world have begun, for several years, to show an even greater interest in "social and emotional intelligence" than

in the specialized skills of future employees, as they seek to hire people with a series of qualities such as: self-control, initiative, ability to concentrate, communication skills, creativity, the ability to work in a team, flexibility, honesty, enjoyment of working with people - exactly those skills that are in decline today .

As a result, since many of the children think more about the computer than about themselves and their values, therefore they must be helped to develop all their attributes and qualities, values, the ability to introspect, to take care of others, to develop spontaneous game skills, and personal satisfaction.

In our increasingly technological world, we are witnessing an unprecedented increase in problems such as attention deficit disorder, antisocial behaviors, poor motivation, depression and ineffective work habits. All of these originate in the emotional centers of the brain and are formed during childhood. The most important neural pathways that regulate these behaviors can only be developed through frequent and affectionate interaction with people, following the development of responsible thinking models.

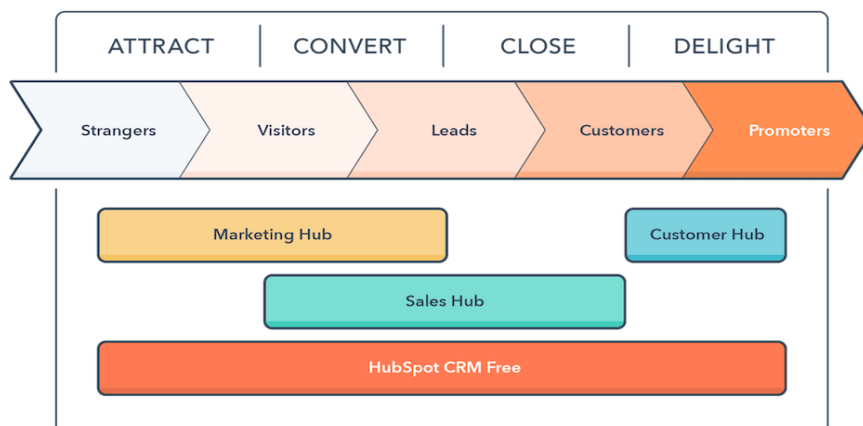
The famous professor Howard Gardner [4] from Harvard said that if we really want our children to learn to be creative, we should emphasize activities that stimulate inventiveness and ingenuity, done together with other children.

3. Conclusion

Customer behavior has changed over time, they now expect more from brands, real-time interaction, digital marketers are facing a new challenge: to present relevant marketing messages, that make their life better and don't distract them from what they are doing.

Today, customers expect seamless, connected, perfect experiences across all channels and instant gratification. There is only one "micro moment" (interaction between a customer and a brand in real time, at the touch of a button) [10] to gain and keep customer attention with a relevant message and a pleasant and interactive experience. Failing that, they move on to the next offer; that is why the old marketing techniques have perished.

Also related to attention, emphasis has recently been placed more and more on the notion of Inbound Marketing - as a new approach to marketing, based on three stages: ATTRACT, ENGAGE, ENJOY.[11]



Source: <https://smarters.ro/>

Modern marketers must adopt a mobile-first approach to global audiences.

- Customers want a unique experience.
- Customers have the last word. Customers decide when, where and how they interact with your brand.
- Customers want a seamless experience and the ability to start a conversation on any channel and be able to seamlessly switch to another channel if they want.
- Customers want to be served in the shortest possible time and in the most convenient way.

On the contrary, when it comes to children, it must be known that they are the most vulnerable in the age of technology and socialization through the devices made available by the modern world. Affective states, emotions have great value for the child's life and existence. [14] They help the child to be in touch with his mental or emotional needs. Emotional development is especially aimed at the child's ability to perceive and express his emotions, to understand and respond to the emotions of others.

Children who are exposed to advertising can be influenced by advertising messages and can develop consumption patterns and buying habits that can have a long-term impact on their buying behavior.

In order to prevent the situation [8] that they experience the syndrome of attention deficit, hyperactivity, etc., they should be presented with the real world from the perspective of some positive aspects. Excessive and obsessive use of the Internet can produce certain changes in the adolescent's psyche. Studies show that internet addiction can lead to mental

health problems, such as anxiety, depression, sleep disorders and low self-esteem. In addition, it can affect interpersonal relationships, decrease academic performance and cause behavioral problems.

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