

Digital Marketing Communication Tools Potential To Create Awareness During Covid 19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Digital marketing communication tools are equivalent to the conventional strategies for communication of an organization, like public relations, advertising, sponsorship, personal selling, direct marketing, and sales promotion. Digital marketing communications helps an organization employ online tools to reach potential customers on the digital platform. But with the outbreak COVID 19 pandemic it has become difficult for organizations to attract new customers and retain existing customers. The research aims to study the scope and potential of digital marketing communications under the pandemic along with the challenges the marketing sector is exposed to in terms of establishing communication and its successful implementation. The study is done based on data collected through surveys. The findings suggested that communication does pose a challenge that impacts the acceptability of digital marketing. The study also suggests that the successful implementation of digital marketing communication tools positively impacts the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users.

Keywords: Digital Marketing Communication, Stakeholders, Awareness, Covid 19 pandemic.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, the communication strategies for an organization would include a mix of public relations, advertising, sponsorship, personal selling, direct marketing, and sales promotion. The digital marketing communication strategy will use all these strategies but in the form of online marketing. A similar approach in the online world can be done through digital media channels. The communication tools of digital marketing can be ad displays, payment per click for advertising, search engine optimization, and affiliate marketing among others. Digital marketing communication has become so advanced that the platform can be used to promote awareness about

various topics. Companies and industries have been using this platform to spread awareness about their respective brands. Similarly, social media and other digital marketing communication platforms can help to measure the global awareness of any kind of disease outbreaks. The use of social media for healthcare awareness is a highly acknowledged phenomenon.

Covid 19 has provided a challenge as well as an opportunity for the digital marketing communication industry (McCall, 2020). The rise of digital media has given rise to better objectives of digital communications in the field of interactivity and efficiency. This has made consumers passive about the brands rather than being reactive consumers of the brand. Studies in the past have shown that having a technical and strategic approach to digital media advertising can be productive for the public (Vapiwala, 2020). It is very obvious for businesses to incur losses due to pandemics, but they can shield themselves through a solid digital marketing plan. On the other hand, businesses should understand that having an online presence is only half battle, the other half consists of attracting and retaining prospective consumers. During the lockdown in the entire world, the internet was the only platform that was still open for consumers to shop and purchase products. The traditional method of consumers approaching bricks and mortar for shopping needs adaptation of the internet to develop relations with the consumers. During this pandemic, the digital approach will not let businesses incur too many losses and prove to be the leading mode to reach consumers.

2. Research problem

With most activities shut down and people now practicing social distancing to prevent the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19), this is probably the most testing time for most brands to connect with their audience. Building a connection with new customers and maintaining your pre-existing ones will be no more difficult than it has been in the recent past. With most organizations already dealing with a slowdown, if not a complete shutdown, marketing during this period will need a lot of creativity and tact to ensure that the message of the brand is effectively communicated. In such tough times, brands must focus on instilling confidence in customers. Innovation, empathy, and relevance should be marketers' tools to survive the negative sentiment and economic slowdown. Brands must be genuine in their efforts and must deliver the right information and means to cope with the situation. In this regard, digital marketing communication holds significant promise as it allows b2b (business to business) and b2c (business to communication) without any physical contact. Despite the significant implications of digital marketing in revolutionizing communications, to our knowledge, no specific studies have attempted to explore the scope and potential of digital marketing communications under the given Covid 19 pandemic circumstances. The current study intends to fill the gap.

3. Aim(s) and Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study will be listed in this section of the study.

- To study the role of digital marketing in managing the current Global Status of Covid 19 Pandemic
- To highlight the challenges that the marketing sector is exposed to in terms of establishing communications.
- To investigate the scope of Digital marketing communications tools in the Covid 19 pandemic circumstances.
- To ascertain the acceptability of digital marketing communications tools among the stakeholders and the users in the long term.
- To identify the challenges that interfere with the successful implementation of digital marketing communications tools.

4. Literature review

4.1 Delineating role of digital marketing communication tools in the industries.

marketing communication means using the new channels of digital communication to make the process of retaining and targeting new stakeholders as well as old stakeholders while at the same time maintaining extensive relationships with them (**Hennig et al., 2010**). With the introduction of digital marketing tools, the stakeholders are no longer passive players for the market, rather they have become active players of the market (**Wymbbs, 2011**). A study was conducted to understand the impact of brand awareness through digital marketing communication. The research indicated that the paid digital content tools of marketing like corporate websites, search engine pages, email communications, and so on had a greater impact when compared to the marketing tools of proactive content like social media. Further, the study also highlighted the importance of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, for building awareness in the future (**Cizmeci and Ercan, 2015**).

Digital marketing tools that consist of digital content are classified into two categories, firstly, marketing communication tools that create paid digital content and then proactive digital content creating marketing tools (**Cizmeci and Ercan, 2015**). Paid digital contents are the type of marketing communications tool where a certain amount of fees is charged and the advertising is allowed in a very controlled way. In the case of paid digital content marketing, a particular space is allotted for the product or the advertisement to be displayed for a certain period. This period is predetermined. More examples of the paid digital content marketing can be corporate websites, SMS, EMS, MMS, IVR, banners, sponsorships, micro-web sites, search engine advertisements, in-app advertisements. Proactive digital content creating has been possible because of web 2.0. This has enabled market interactions to be two-way rather than one-way. Proactive content creating digital tools are search engine optimization and social media networks (**Karjaluoto et al., 2015**).

Along with this, social networking sites can be used in advertising healthcare campaigns to improve the audience's lifestyle. For this purpose, many healthcare organizations have been spending a lot of money and time advertising on digital platforms. This has been because digital

marketing platforms offer a very cost-effective way of advertising. Digital communications platforms are also helping people maintaining social distance by letting people work from home, attend online classes, online mental health services (**Anderson and Vogels, 2020**). Although the privacy concerns of such communications platforms remain a major concern, especially the flow of confidential information.

4.2 Comprehending the utilization of digital marketing in increasing awareness

Social is one of the best digital communication tools (**Karjaluoto et al., 2015**). This helps in reaching a larger audience at once. This was evident by research conducted in Bangladesh. **Thornber (2019)** conducted a study to understand the potential of digital marketing tools in spreading awareness of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in the rural places of Bangladesh where reaching through physical interaction was difficult. The research used a four-minute video to convey the importance of knowing AMR and its side effects on the farmers. Out of a sample size of 40 farmers, 97% said they could understand its importance through the video and wanted to spread its awareness among their neighbours. The respondents liked this method of communication, they thought this was a good way to spread awareness about other issues. This social media campaign generated 9100 views. Even Though this project was at its preliminary stage, it showed the capacity of digital communications in spreading awareness regarding various health-related issues even in the remotest areas. Contrary to the traditional form of communication tool, digital communication tools facilitate quantifying changes in disease awareness and understanding the sentiment of people towards treatments and prevention interventions (**Fung et al., 2015**).

Digital use also allows healthcare officials to detect, investigate, and analyze any kind of outbreaks. Worldwide the governments and medical experts have been looking for various methods to keep their people updated about the virus and the measures & their solutions. In this view digital marketing tools have emerged as a viable option to assist the government and spread healthcare information to its people (**Vikram - WIPRO, 2010**). **The studies of Leeflang et. al., (2014)** reveal that filling “talent gaps”, adjusting the “organizational design”, and implementing “actionable metrics” are the biggest improvement opportunities for companies across sectors. Shared situational awareness is an important method of sharing information and improving decision-making in crisis response.

4.3 Understanding covid-19 and implication of digital marketing communication during an epidemic.

Coronavirus has been termed as a disease that can result in death if an individual is affected. It has caused a lot of casualties since its appearance in Wuhan, China in December 2019. This disease affects the respiratory system of the body causing severe damage to it. Research conducted on understanding its impact has shown that it is highly terminal for old age people and people who have a weaker immune system (Xu et al., 2020). This disease has caused various issues with health

experts as it creates challenges for doctors and researchers. World health organizations have also identified that one out of every three people has been infected by the virus.

This exchange of information during a pandemic should be rapid. To make it rapid, it should be done through modern channels of information sharing or communication (**Wong, Leo, and Tan, 2020**). Based on the study, out of all the digital communication tools, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook were analyzed for the spread of the information related to awareness of coronavirus. This analysis was done on various societies and it was found that there had been an increase in the flow of information of covid-19. This information also included the exchange of wrong information about the virus (Cinelli et al., 2020). It has been clear that globally people have been afraid of the spread of wrong information about the virus than the spread of the virus itself, but when a person gets information on social media correctly then it can help the individual in disseminating the correct and reliable data (**Depoux et al., 2020**). Modern technology is very important at this stage of the pandemic so that further transmission of this virus can be avoided (**Peeri et al., 2020**).

A study was conducted to understand and identify the significance of digital communication or advertising in spreading awareness about covid19 and its capability to bring change in the attitude of people towards it. The study was able to exhibit that information sharing, health advertising, and healthcare awareness are the best way to predict covid-19 awareness through digital media advertising. Different strategies are required in the field of digital media communication to spread awareness about major health issues. Advertisements through online or digital channels can be helpful in the case of spreading awareness on coronavirus (**Habes et al., 2020**). This can be seen in the light of public service. This strategy can be particularly used to educate people on the ways to prevent the spread of this virus and protect themselves from getting infected, as still, globally many individuals have not taken these measures seriously (**Karasneh et al., 2020**). The studies have shown that frequently receiving and watching media sources for information on the pandemic has increased the awareness level among medical professionals as well as general people. Risk perception must be considered by the government for communication of the planning. The role of social media needs to be enhanced to encourage compliance and containment measures (**Chan et al., 2020**).

5. Research Methodology

The research methodology is an important section of the study as it guides the researcher on how to approach the study. The current study is using a mixed research approach, where both qualitative and quantitative methods are used. The qualitative method reviews the existing research while the quantitative method involves a questionnaire-based survey involving stakeholders to perceive their opinion on the acceptability of digital marketing communications under the given COVID-19 circumstances. The research design is descriptive and explanatory. Data collection involves both primary and secondary techniques. A non-Probability convenience sampling method is implemented for the recruitment of the respondents. Data analysis is conducted using SPSS and AMOS. The collection of data is done through a nominal scale and 5 points-based Likert scale.

6. Results:

6.1 Demographic characteristics:

Data analysis is considered an important aspect of the research paper as it enables us to evaluate the core reason for the study. The data analysis helps in the conversion of raw data into quantitative forms for better interpretation of the results of the study. The current study has adopted the questionnaire and has analyzed the view of 236 stakeholders and users on the significance of digital marketing tools in creating awareness on the COVID-19 pandemics. From the survey conducted for the study, it was observed that 50.0% of the respondents were aged between 31 – 40 years. Then came respondents between the age group of 21 - 30 years with 27.5% of the respondents, then 41 - 50 years being 9.7% and the least number of respondents were from the age group of above 60 years of age. It was also observed that almost 41.1% of the respondents had an annual income of between 300001 - 500000. The second-highest number of respondents were from the income group of 100001 - 300000, followed by the income group of 700001 and above with 17.8%. The least number of respondents came from the income group of 10,0000 and less with 9.7%. Furthermore, it was observed that about 65.3% of the respondents were single, while 34.7% of the respondents were married.

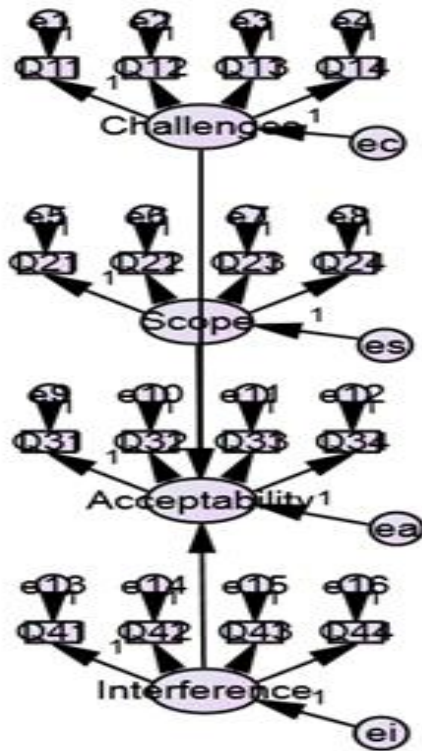
6.2 Reliability

Reliability in statistics indicates the inter-item consistency. The Cronbach's alpha of this research ranged from 0.604 to 0.676 which is deemed to be good. But all the items were considered for further analysis.

Variables	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Challenges	0.97
Scope	0.74
Acceptability	0.98
Interference	0.98

6.3 Preliminary model

The path diagram for the preliminary model which is used for confirmatory factor analysis was as follows,



6.4 Model fit indices

The values of different indices were as follows,

	Model fit	Desired score
Chi-Square	3069.002	NA
Degrees of Freedom	101	NA
CMIN/DF	30.386	≤ 2.00 for good fit and 2.00 – 5.00 for moderate fit.
CFI	0.694	Close to or more than 0.90 for good fit
RMSEA	0.354	≤ 0.10 reflects good fit
NFI	0.688	A value close to 0.90 reflects a good fit

The table above shows that the chi-square value was 3069.002, DF was 101 and the CMIN/DF was 30.386 indicating a poor fit model. The CFI was 0.610 which is far from 0.9 and RMSEA was 0.354 indicating a poor fit. However, the value of NFI was far from 0.9 indicating a poor fit.

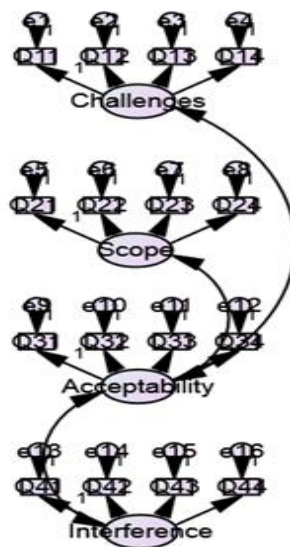
6.5 Validity

The principal component analysis was carried out to reduce a large set of data to obtain a meaningful smaller set of constructs. Each variable used in the analysis was measured by multi-item constructs by factor analysis with varimax rotation to check the unidimensionality among the items. The constructs included in the confirmatory factor analysis had Cronbach's alpha of more than 0.8. The Cronbach's alpha indicated the internal consistency between the constructs and it is deemed to be good. All the items included in the analysis had factor loadings of 0.4. Hence this indicated the assessment and validation by using the discriminant and convergent validity. The convergent validity was also assessed by using the factor loadings of latent constructs which had a significant p-value of less than 0.001. This test supported that the constructs had convergent validity. The discriminant validity was indicated by the correlation matrix where the majority of the constructs had a correlation coefficient of less than 0.85 and also by using the path analysis where the correlations among the latent constructs were less than 1.

6.6 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A preliminary model was set for confirmatory factor analysis by using AMOS. The preliminary model allowed the researcher for its best fit as per parsimony and substantive meaningfulness. The model fit indices indicated how the underlying structure fits the data. The model was evaluated by using the model fit indices including Chi-Square statistic, Degrees of Freedom (DF), CMIN/DF, CFI, and RMSEA.

6.7 Measurement model



6.8 Model fit indices

	Model fit	Desired score
Chi-Square	3069.002	NA
Degrees of Freedom	101	NA
CMIN/DF	30.386	≤ 2.00 for good fit and 2.00 – 5.00 for moderate fit.
CFI	0.694	Close to or more than 0.90 for good fit
RMSEA	0.354	≤ 0.10 reflects good fit
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- **Testing of hypothesis**

Covariances: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Challenges	<-->	Acceptability	.033	.016	2.051	.040	par_13
Scope	<-->	Acceptability	.303	.032	9.399	***	par_14
Acceptability	<-->	Interference	.887	.086	10.320	***	par_15

H₀₁: The establishment of communication poses challenges that do not impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users.

H_{A1}: The establishment of communication poses challenges that positively impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users.

The beta coefficient between the challenges and acceptability was 0.033 and its corresponding p-value was $0.04 < 0.05$. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, we can conclude that the establishment of communication poses challenges that positively impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users. Hence, we can accept the alternate hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis.

H₀₂: The scope of digital marketing communication tools in COVID 19 is not impacted by the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users.

H_{A2}: The scope of digital marketing communication tools in COVID 19 is impacted by the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users.

The beta coefficient between the scope and acceptability was 0.303 and its corresponding p-value was $0.000 < 0.05$. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, we can conclude that the establishment of communication poses challenges that positively impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users. Hence, we can accept the alternate hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis.

H₀₃: The challenges that interfere with the successful implementation of digital marketing communication tools do not impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users.

H_{A3}: The challenges that interfere with the successful implementation of digital marketing communication tools positively impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users.

The beta coefficient between the interference and acceptability was 0.887 and its corresponding p-value was $0.000 < 0.05$. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, we can conclude that the challenges that interfere with the successful implementation of digital marketing

7. Discussion

By analysing the scope and challenges of digital marketing tools during the COVID pandemic, this study aims to understand the potential digital marketing communication tools have to spread awareness about the pandemic and its acceptability among its long-term stakeholders & users. The results of the study show that the establishment of communication poses challenges that positively impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users. This research is in line with Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlstrom, and Freundt (2014) as their results proved that the talent gaps, organizational design, and actionable metrics were some of the biggest challenges and also opportunities to develop for companies across sectors. Further, the studies also showed that digital marketing communication tools in COVID 19 are impacted by the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users. Research by Kim (2020) has shown that consumers were already buying more products online, the Covid pandemic has only accelerated its structural change. Furthermore, the study also concluded that the challenges that interfere with the successful implementation of digital marketing communication tools positively impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users. This research is in line with the research conducted by Alam, Wang, and Waheed, (2019), which revealed that there was a positive association between digital marketing and consumers' online impulsive buying tendencies.

8. Conclusion

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope for digital marketing communication tools has increased in businesses as the digital world has become the new norm to attract new customers and at the same time retain the old consumers of the business. This study was conducted to understand the scope and potential of digital marketing communications under the given COVID-19 pandemic circumstances. It also tried to study the challenges that the marketing sector is facing and its acceptability among various stakeholders. The study was able to show that communication will be challenging as it positively impacts the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users, along with that the study also showed that the digital marketing communication tools will be impacted by COVID 19 pandemic as it will be difficult to find its acceptability by stakeholders and users. Further, the study was also able to prove that the challenges that interfere with the successful implementation of digital marketing communication tools positively impact the acceptability of digital marketing by stakeholders and users. Further studies in this field can be done regarding the different approaches digital marketers adopted to reach the market as well as the consumers and the changes it brought to their organizational dimensions.

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