



**JOURNAL OF SOCIAL RESEARCH
DEVELOPMENT**

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**A STUDY ON PERCEPTIONS OF MARKETING PROFESSIONALS TOWARDS THE
DIGITAL MARKETING IN SAUDI ARABIA**

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Digital Marketing, Social Media Marketing, SMS Marketing, YouTube Marketing, SEO Tools, Marketing Professionals, Saudi Arabia	The current study was intended to analyze the perceptions of the marketing professional toward digital marketing and digital marketing tools specifically in Saudi Arabia. Approach of this study was quantitative in nature, in which the primary sources were the marketing professionals and secondary sources were relevant journals and articles. Wilska's (2003) instrument was used to measure perceptions of professional whereas, data was collected with the help of convenience sampling technique. Descriptive statistical analysis was used for this study. Results revealed a significant positive response in terms of agreement about perceptions of marketing professionals to effectiveness of digital marketing in Saudi Arabia. It is revealed that professionals in Saudi Arabia are satisfied with use and effectiveness of different digital marketing tools i.e., SEO Tools, Website Content, SMS Marketing, YouTube Marketing, Social Media Apps like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Results explored that on relying digital marketing tools, marketing professionals perceived their business at low cost and it can benefit in different ways. The limitations and suggestions of studies have been addressed.
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DOI	https://doi.org/10.53664/JSRD/02-02-2021-02-120-128

INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is used as an umbrella term for the marketing of products and services on internet. Not only on internet, but it includes also other digital technologies like display advertising, and mobile phones. The digital marketing has started using in 1990s and it has changed marketing style that companies use to advertise their brands. Now, companies are exclusively using the digital marketing and have become more efficient and dominant. Because platform of digital marketing gradually integrates marketing plans in everyday life as, people are reluctant to go outside and prefer to use digital technologies (Kannan & Li, 2017). Concept of digital marketing and its practical implementation has rapidly emerged

over the past few decades. To define this term generally, it is the selling and purchasing of information, services and products online through the support of the internet (Sathya, 2015). Though, the concept of digital marketing is not merely restricted to selling and purchasing of products and services online. Sivasankaran, (2017) defined digital marketing as “process of the acquiring and retaining customers, building customer preferences and promoting brands thus by increasing sales”.

Kannanand (2017) defined digital marketing as “adaptive, technology enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders”. Concept of “digital marketing” has now emerged over the certain period time from particular concept of knowing it as marketing of services and goods with help of digital channels, to a broader concept of defining it as procedure of efficiently utilizing digital technologies to excel clientele, promote brands and amplify sales (Kannan & Li, 2017). Digital technologies are majorly consisted of but not restricted to, Smartphone, internet, display advertising and any diverse digital medium (Anjali, 2017). Digital marketing has emerged as the most cost-effective way of marketing over the last few years which is worldwide applicable concurrently. It has unlocked innovative gateways for the companies thus by providing them novel prospects to cater potential customers all around the world (Khan & Mahapatra, 2009). It facilitated firms in reducing barriers across the globe thus by attaining probable clients. Furthermore, with the assistance of digital marketing mediums, firms are capable of directly communicating with the probable clients in a very short span of time.

Digital marketing helped out companies in building strong and long-lasting relationship with customers not only has this, but the queries generated by the clients could be replied rapidly and their issues can be resolved there and then instantly (Mahalaxmi & Ranjith, 2016). In this way, it has made the firms capable of the directly approaching the customers without the help of intermediaries thus by creating the powerful value and building strong relationship with them. It has also made the firms capable enough to attain high degree of customers’ satisfaction (Salehi, Mirzaei, Aghaei & Milad, 2012). It ultimately enabled the firms to excel their sales and generate huge demands, also it is the cost-effective way of advertising goods through which firms can enhance their performance level. Considering above facts and due to the impact of digital marketing in maintaining firm and enduring relationships between clients and firms, the rapidly growing number of the clients, growing requirement of services and goods, elevated sales and the overall firm’s performance, it is being decided to conduct a study on this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of digital marketing has changed since its evolution in the early 1990s. The idea of digital marketing invented from internet and seeing the ranking of search engines (SE) websites. The first SE was started in 1991 through network protocol named as Gopher

for the query and search. Later, in 1994 the launch of Yahoo companies started to increase their ranking on websites (Smyth, 2007). The concept of digital marketing grew over the past few decades, through digital marketing buying and selling of product and services and information done online with the help of internet (Sathya, 2015). But the concept of digital marketing is plentiful than just buying and selling of good and services through online. In this connection, Sivasankaran (2017) labels that it is "process of using digital technologies to acquire customers and build customer preferences, promote brands, retain customers and increase sales".

Kannan and Li (2017) defined digital marketing as "adaptive, technology enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders". Technologically advances countries have realized the true value of digital marketing and countries like USA, Japan, and China have moved from conventional marketing towards digital marketing. The companies operating in these countries are successfully applying digital marketing tools to promote businesses and satisfy their customers (Khan & Siddiqui, 2013). Furthermore, with the technological advancement in the mobile phone devices, the use of internet and social media apps have significantly increased all across globe. Thus, digital marketing has enabled all companies to create brand awareness, and promote their product etc. to obtain success (Mangold, 2009). In this connection, by using these means of the communication, it is helpful for the company to develop strong relationship with customers (Yasmin, Tasneem & Fatema, 2015). Also, via using digital marketing channels like Twitter, Facebook, and company's website etc. organizations are capable enough to contact with the potential customers quickly in the less time.

Digital marketing empowered companies to bypass all intermediaries and directly contacted with customers for building the relationship and builds value to take real-time feedback of their practices. Ultimately, it leads to high sales and demand through less cost spending on advertising and it will increase company's performance (Sathya, 2015). Shankar (2010) said that technologies that are related to the development like advanced mobile devices, increase in powerful search engines, peer to peer communication channels, interfaces etc. increase the ability of marketers to reach potential customers via new customers' touch point. Companies are focusing on diverse digital marketing techniques like advertisement through different renowned website e.g., Yahoo and Hotmail, through social media apps like Facebook and LinkedIn etc. It has opened new doors and opportunities for companies to reach their millions of potential customers and create brand awareness about products and services (Khan & Siddiqui, 2013). In this regard, it is necessary for potential marketing professionals to understand the marketing campaigns that could be executed through the social media and also realize that how they could do it efficiently through the indicators of performance measurements.

Because the dynamics of market are changing throughout the world as the accessibility of social media and its usages have gradually increased in young generation. Thus, it is very important for organizations to adopt strategic integration approaches in their marketing communication plans (Rohm & Hanna, 2011). In addition, Word of mouth is associated with escalating traffic and acquiring new members on website which eventually augment the visibility in terms of marketing. While discussing social media, it is pertinent to quote the example of Facebook that has not only opened novel marketing prospects but it has also opened the door for businesses to communicate with millions of potential customers regarding products and services. This can only be made possible by acquainting managers with opposite usage of communication strategies so that, they may excel their experience thus by engaging customers (Mangold, 2009). At times social media platforms were used by individuals to get connected with family and friends, but now the situation is changed and social media platforms had become highly advanced. They have now become a place where consumers can now learn about the companies they like and they can also get to know about the products they sell.

These social sites are now heavily utilized by the marketers and retailers as an alternative way to reach consumers and provide them a new innovative way to shop. "Technological developments such as powerful search engines, Smartphone devices and interfaces, peer-to-peer communication vehicles, and online social networks have extended marketers' ability to reach customers through new touch points" (Shankar et al. 2011). Also, various new techniques of digital marketing are becoming more and more common now a days i.e., search engine marketing (SEM), content marketing, engine optimization (SEO), content automation, data-driven marketing, campaign marketing, influencer marketing, social media optimization, social media marketing, optical disks and games (Sivasankaran, 2017). Stephen (2015) identified five constructs to study the digital marketing. First is consumer digital culture, second is responses to digital advertising, third one is effects of digital environments on consumer behavior, fourth one is mobile environments, and fifth one is online word of mouth.

Research Question

The research question of study was; Does digital marketing has an impact on marketing professionals of Saudi Arabia to use it as an effective tool of Marketing?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample involved marketing professionals who experience digital marketing in Saudi Arabia specifically in the Jeddah City. The sample of one hundred marketing professionals (both males and females) was included. For this study Wilska (2003) instrument is used to measure the perceptions of marketing professionals. The adapted questionnaire is based on five- point Likert scale. Quantitative study was selected because of scope and nature of the study. The sampling technique used in this study is convenience sampling because of

its effectiveness and feasibility. Data was personally collected by visiting different marketing professionals which were at convenience to the researcher. For this study, the descriptive analysis technique has been used and for statistical analysis MS Excel 2010 has been used. For scores obtained regarding each construct of digital marketing and digital marketing tools, mean has been calculated. In order to measure the dispersion in the data, standard deviation has been calculated. In order to graphically show the data; tables, graphs and charts had also been developed through Microsoft Excel 2010.

Table 1 Analysis of Perceptions

Perceptions	M	SD
Digital Marketing:	4.53	0.50
Is a new avenue for promotion mix?	1.69	0.87
May provide content not in line with our believes.	2.20	0.84
Can be misleading?	2.20	0.72
Rewrites contents for privacy issues.	4.29	0.80
Accelerates revenue growth/	4.36	0.66

DATA ANALYSIS

The data has been analyzed wherein the desired information has been extracted that is helpfully in reaching the anticipated conclusion and outcomes of the present research in systematic manners.

Table 2 Mean & Standard Deviation of Perceptions of Marketing Professionals

Perceptions	M	SD
Has low investment?	4.46	0.78
Provides customer's participation/	4.20	0.69
Generates immediate response from customers.	4.53	0.57
Attracts attention very quickly.	4.09	1.02
Is much more measurable?	4.32	0.76
Creates marketing opportunities.	4.44	0.71

The results show that for most of the questions related to perceptions of the marketing professionals towards digital marketing, mean values are high and standard deviation was low which shows that they have mostly given an agree response. It is a strong indicator of inclination of marketing professionals towards digital marketing. It shows that marketing professionals in the Saudi Arabia are relying on digital marketing as the marketing tool. It suggests that marketing professionals strongly feels that digital marketing is an effective tool for marketing related activities and it is benefiting them in different ways like, it's a new avenue for promotion mix, accelerates growth, requires low investment, allow customer participation, provides immediate response from customer, attracts attention of customers

quickly, creates more marketing opportunities and very useful for positive WOM. Instead, the mean values were found low for the statements like unethical or irrelevant contents, misleading content and privacy issues. It indicates that marketing professionals in Saudi Arabia are very much confident that digital marketing will not be much affected with these sorts of issues and these issues will not decrease the effectiveness of digital marketing in Saudi Arabia.

Table 3 Mean & Standard Deviation of Marketing Professionals Perceptions

Digital Marketing Tools	M	SD
SEO - Google Rankings	4.00	0.92
SEO - Keywords Tags	3.80	0.75
Website Contents	3.74	0.82
Mobile Phone - MMS	3.18	0.95
Mobile Phone - SMS	4.42	0.85
Youtube	3.78	0.94
Online Videos	3.14	0.94
Social Media - Facebook	4.08	0.93
Social Media - linkedIn	4.38	0.72
Social Media -Twitter	4.38	0.82
Webinars	4.08	0.80
Pay-per-click	4.16	0.90
Inlinks	4.10	0.98
Google Analytics	4.14	0.77
Blogs	4.32	0.90
E-Newsletters	4.10	0.94
SEO - Title Tags	4.36	0.84
SEO - META Tags / descriptions	4.60	0.72

The results show that for most of the questions related to the perceptions of the marketing professionals toward digital marketing tools, mean values are high and standard deviation was low which shows that they have mostly given agree response. It is a strong indicator of satisfaction of the marketing professionals regarding effectiveness of different digital marketing tools. It indicates that marketing professionals in Saudi Arabia are relying on different digital marketing tools as marketing tool. It advises that marketing professionals strongly feels that digital marketing tools can be used as an effective tool for marketing related activities. They feel that SEO tools, website contents, mobile SMS, YouTube, social media apps like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. can be used as a tool to digital marketing and they perceive that it will promote their business at low cost and it can benefit in different ways.

Alternatively, the mean values were found low for statements related to effectiveness of few of the digital marketing tools like effectiveness of mobile MMS and online videos

marketing tools were responded as less effective as compared to other digital marketing tools. It depicts that marketing professionals in Saudi Arabia are very much confident that digital marketing tools like mobile MMS and online videos will not be much effective and these tools will not much increase the sales and growth of respective companies in Saudi Arabia.

Table 4 Overall Mean & Standard Deviation of Digital Marketing and Digital Marketing Tools

Factors	M	SD
Digital Marketing	3.78	0.74
Digital Marketing Tools	4.04	0.86

The overall mean analysis of perceptions of the marketing professionals towards the digital marketing resulted as 3.78 with standard deviation of 0.74 respectively. The results shows that a highly positive response has been received in terms of the "Agree" that's why overall mean value was high and standard deviation was low. Overall mean analysis of perceptions of the marketing professionals towards digital marketing tools resulted as 4.04 with standard deviation of 0.86 respectively. The results shows that a highly positive response has been received in terms of the "Agree" that's why overall mean value was high and standard deviation was low.

CONCLUSION

This study observed the perception of marketing professionals towards digital marketing and effectiveness of digital marketing tools in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Marketing professionals in the Saudi Arabia are relying on digital marketing as a marketing tool. It suggests that marketing professionals strongly feels that digital marketing is effective tool for marketing related activities and it is benefiting them in different ways like, it's a new avenue for the promotion mix, accelerates growth, requires low investment, allow customer participation, provides immediate response from the customer, attracts attention of customers quickly, creates more marketing opportunities, and very useful for positive WOM. Contrary to this, the unethical or irrelevant contents, misleading contents, and privacy issues will not much affect digital marketing in Saudi Arabia and these issues will not decrease effectiveness of digital marketing in Saudi Arabia. It can be finally concluded that marketing professionals strongly feels that digital marketing tools can be used as an effective tool for marketing related activities. In this connection, SEO tools, website contents, mobile SMS, YouTube, social media apps like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs etc. can be used as a tool for digital marketing and they perceive that it will promote their business at low cost and it can benefit in different ways.

Limitations & Future Recommendations

The major limitation of this study was the behavior of respondents as some respondents were reluctant or hesitant to participate in study due to nature of the study and its scope.

Another limitation was small sample size, as only 100 respondents were selected for study which is certainly very small amount. As per results of study, it is strongly recommended that all companies regardless of their size and nature should focus on use of the digital marketing in Saudi Arabia through different marketing tools like SEO tools, social media apps and through mobile SMS etc. It will open new doors for them, allow them to target new audience irrespective of geographical location and moreover, it costs very low and its spread is very fast. SEO tools, website contents, mobile SMS, YouTube, social media apps like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs etc. should be used as tool for digital marketing because companies perceive that it will promote their business at low cost and it is beneficial for them in different ways.

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