

A Complete Review on Digital Marketing Evolution

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Abstract—This study provides a comprehensive overview of the key trends and innovations shaping digital marketing strategies in the contemporary landscape. The advent of digital technologies has revolutionized marketing practices worldwide. Digital marketing emerged as a necessity driven by advancements in internet accessibility, mobile technologies, and data analytics. This research article investigates the evolution of digital marketing from its early stages to its current forms, explores its impact on consumer's behavior, and examines the role of emerging technologies such as AI, machine learning, and big data. Marketers now have access to an expansive array of tools and techniques to engage with consumers across various digital channels. Personalization emerges as the fundamental pillar of modern digital marketing enabling brands to deliver tailored experiences that resonate with individual preferences and behaviors. Leveraging data analytics and AI, marketers can segment audiences, customize content and optimize campaigns for maximum impact. Moreover, the study has been evidence by itself how rural areas have revolutionized from lack of internet and network to modern way of internet and electronic gadget uses. Covid-19 is found as another reason in this study for the booming of digital marketing. The findings reveal that digital marketing continues to adapt rapidly, with personalization, automation, and customer experience at its core. Recommendations for marketers emphasize the need for strategic integration of technologies with ethical considerations and consumer-centric approaches [3], [8], [20], [24].

Index Terms—Digital marketing, Digital technologies, Marketing evolution, Online Marketing, Internet accessibility, Mobile technologies and Data Analytics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital Marketing has led to evolutionary transformation in the environment of Business, the strategies inculcated by business have evolved, which indirectly benefit profit making ideas, the return on investments. The practice of marketing has evolved

significantly over the past few decades. From traditional print and broadcast to interactive online platforms, digital marketing has redefined how brands communicate with consumers.

Digital marketing integrates technologies such as e-mail, search engines, social media, content platforms, and mobile applications to engage audiences and generate values. The mass adoption and usage of the internet into everyday life is the single biggest event that affected marketing, especially over the best last three decades.

Although every desktop publishing software in the first PCs caused a surge in print marketing in the 1980s, the computers were little more than a glorified typewriter. The landscape evolved, from email to search engines like YAHOO! (1994) and GOOGLE (1997) and e-commerce sites like Amazon (1994) and eBay (1995). For marketing this was a goldmine.

Email became the new outbound marketing tool, joining the traditional arsenal of T.V, radio and print advertisements and telephone sales. Digital marketing was also born out of the increasing competition among the marketers, the growing hunger to earn more profits, to lead the global market, to reach every corner of the world. [1]–[3], [5]

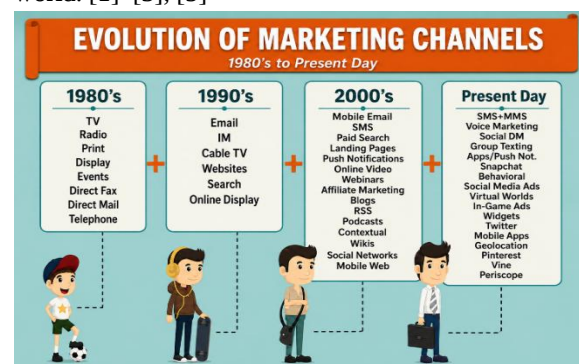


Fig 1: It shows the evolution for various Digital Marketing Channels.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital marketing refers to all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or the internet. Business leverage channels such as search engines, social media, email, and websites to connect the current and prospective customers (Chaffey & Ellis Chadwick, 2016). In the current world, consumers perspectives towards purchasing behaviour have got a sharp transformational shift towards it. This has impacted the mindset of industrialists to remodel the pattern of merchandising goods, reaching the products to the door- step consumers with the adaption of various social media platforms in digital marketing [1], [4]. Within the reference of the table given below, digitalization has laid the groundwork for modern renovation of traditional marketing legacy system into

a comprehensive digital marketing experience. Various promotional activities, advertisements, research and development, ecommerce activities digital transactions are being synchronized for the upcoming growth of factors such as returns and financial gains by boosting sales and productivity. It indirectly stands proportional to the brand value and goodwill of the firm. Thus, the future beholds within extraneous transformational surge in the goodwill of the firm [3], [6].

The Government of India has been supporting digitalization through initiatives such as social media applications for the support of people of INDIA living in the abroad, applications that provide SMS based on climatic condition and forecast of weather, facilities like Aadhar card, PAN card could be availed by the citizens of INDIA [6].

Table I: The Table Represents Works Of Various Authors Conducted On The Multiple Publications.

S. No.	Author(s) & Year	Area of Study	Contribution
1	Philip Kotler (2017)	Marketing Evolution	Introduced transition from traditional to digital marketing (Marketing 1.0 → 4.0) [2]
2	Dave Chaffey (2019)	Digital Strategy	Developed digital marketing frameworks and planning models [1]
3	Neil Patel (2020)	SEO & Content Marketing	Emphasized importance of SEO and content-driven traffic
4	Ryan Deiss (2018)	Customer Journey	Introduced Customer Value Journey model
5	Gary Vaynerchuk (2019)	Social Media Marketing	Highlighted role of personal branding & social engagement
6	Seth Godin (2018)	Permission Marketing	Introduced concept of permission-based marketing
7	Rand Fishkin (2021)	Search Engine Optimization	Advanced keyword research & search ranking techniques
8	Avinash Kaushik (2020)	Web Analytics	Promoted data-driven marketing and analytics frameworks

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research approach based on extensive literature analysis of academic journals, industry reports and case studies. Sources include peer-reviewed articles, authoritative books, and digital marketing white papers. The semi-systematic literature review has been performed by discovering diverse published articles on ResearchGate, Springer, Google Scholar, Srinivas publications, and many other websites [3], [6].

Therefore, these various secondary sources of evidence have been a pillar of support for the study of “DIGITAL MARKETING EVOLUTION”.

IV. THE DIGITAL MARKETING/DIGITAL JOURNEY

The digital age took off with the advent of the internet and the development of Web1.0 platform. The Web1.0 platform allowed users to find the information they wanted but did not permit them to share this information over the web. Up until then, marketers worldwide were still flummoxed and remained unsure of the digital platform. Nowadays, Internet is evolving at a very quick pace. Digital marketing is defined as the ritual of promotion and advertising of various products and services creatively. Digital marketing began with

simple online advertising- such as banner ads and email campaigns. The first widely recognized clickable ad appeared in 1994, generating leads and reminding marketers of the potential of online channels. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram provide data rich environments, enabling precision targeting and community building. Social media influencers became a new marketing force. It was in the later years starting from 1990, everyone started using the term digital marketing and by the year 1995, 16 million people were already the users of internet around the world, which then in 2002 was increased to around 600 million and the time duration of Americans using internet was increased from half an hour to approximately 11 hours per day.

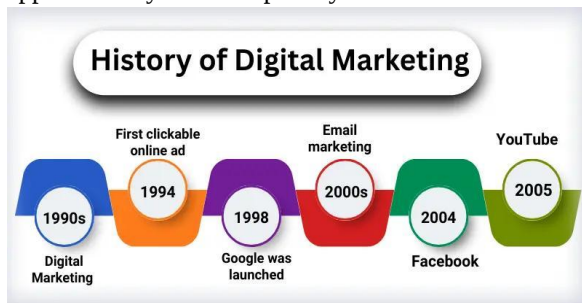


Fig 2 Showing the evolution of marketing through various platforms.

As an impact of digital marketing, in India the internet was introduced in the mid-year 1995, which led for the transformation of traditional form of business dealings into digital form. It was later in the year 1980, the marketing strategies were modernized and brought in the form of digital marketing from traditional form [4]–[6]. 1998 saw the birth of the Google. Microsoft launched the MSN search engine and YAHOO brought to the market. Two years later, the internet bubble burst and all the smaller search engines were either left behind or wiped out leaving more space for the giants in the business. The digital marketing world saw its first steep surge in 2006 when search engine traffic was reported to have grown to about 6.4 billion in a single month. Then came Web 2.0, where people became more active participants rather than remain passive users. Web 2.0 allows users to interact with other users and businesses.

Labels like „super information highways began to be applied to the internet. As a result, information flow volumes –including channels utilized by digital

marketers- increased manifold, and by 2004, internet advertising and marketing in the US alone brought in around \$2.9 billion. Digital marketing crossed the booming stage mainly during COVID-19 period. Through technological medium, healthcare sectors, utilized marketing tools and ideas to advertise the hospital brand name, their services, the professional services and doctors they provide. [1], [5], [6]

While people were stuck at their homes during COVID times, digital marketing introduced work from home due to which employees feel cared and safe working from home. This has been a common scenario during pandemic times. [23], [24]

V. SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

Engine Optimization (SEO) is a core component of digital marketing that has evolved significantly alongside the growth of the internet. In the early stages of digital marketing, SEO mainly focused on keyword stuffing and basic on-page techniques to rank websites on search engines. As search engines became more advanced, particularly with the rise of Google, SEO shifted toward user-centric strategies [7], [13], [14].

Modern SEO emphasizes high-quality content, relevant keywords, mobile optimization, website speed, user experience, and authoritative backlinks. Algorithm updates have made it essential for marketers to focus on ethical (white hat) practices rather than manipulation. Additionally, SEO now integrates with content marketing, social media, and voice search optimization [7], [14].

In the evolution of digital marketing, SEO has transformed from a technical tactic into a strategic approach that enhances online visibility, drives organic traffic, and builds long-term brand credibility. [7], [15]

A. Early Stage (1990s – Early 2000s): Keyword-Based

During the 1990s and early 2000s, SEO was in its early stage and was mostly simple, technical, and keyword focused. At that time, search engines used basic algorithms to rank websites. These algorithms were not very advanced, so they mainly depended on visible signals such as keywords, meta tags, and the number of backlinks [1], [5], [7].

In this period, website owners focused heavily on adding keywords repeatedly within the content to

improve ranking. This practice was known as keyword stuffing. Meta tags were also considered very important because search engines used them to understand the topic of a webpage. Along with this, backlinks played a major role in ranking, but the focus was more on the quantity of links rather than their quality [5], [7].

Overall, early SEO was less concerned with user experience and content quality. The main goal was to match search engine requirements by using keywords and technical elements. Since search engine algorithms were basic, many websites could achieve higher rankings through simple optimization techniques rather than genuinely helpful content [5], [7].

B. Middle Stage (2005 – 2015): Algorithm & Content Focus

In the next stage, search engines, especially Google, started improving their ranking systems through major algorithm updates. These updates changed the way websites were evaluated and reduced the importance of manipulative SEO practices. Google began to focus more on content quality, link authenticity, and the real purpose behind a user's search [7], [13].

The Panda update was introduced to control low-quality, copied, and thin content. It encouraged websites to publish original, useful, and well-written information. The Penguin update focused on backlinks and penalized websites that used spammy or unnatural link-building methods. Later, the Hummingbird update improved Google's ability to understand search intent, meaning, and context instead of only matching exact keywords [7], [13].

As a result, SEO shifted from keyword stuffing to quality content and user-focused optimization. Websites could no longer depend only on repeated keywords or large numbers of backlinks. Instead, they had to provide meaningful content that answered user queries properly [7], [14].

During this period, blogging, content marketing, and ethical SEO practices became more popular. White-hat SEO gained importance because it followed search engine guidelines and focused on long-term ranking through genuine content, useful information, and natural optimization [1], [6], [7].

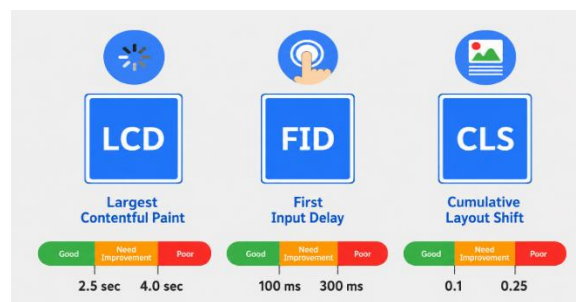


Fig 3 Google's new Algorithm updates

C. Modern Stage (2016 – Present): User Intent & AI-Based SEO

SEO has changed a lot over time. Earlier, it was mainly related to using proper keywords, creating backlinks, and improving basic website structure. Now, search engines give more importance to the user's actual need. The main aim of modern SEO is to provide useful, relevant, and easy-to-access information to users [7], [8], [14].

One important change in SEO is mobile-first indexing. Since most people use mobile phones for searching, websites must work properly on mobile devices. Voice search has also become common because users now search through tools like Siri and Google Assistant. Due to this, content should be written in a natural and conversational way [7], [13].

Artificial intelligence and machine learning have also improved the search process. Systems such as Rank Brain and BERT help search engines understand the meaning and context of a user's query. Along with this, Core Web Vitals are also important because they focus on page speed, loading time, and overall user experience [7], [8], [14].

Therefore, modern SEO is not only about keywords. It also depends on search intent, useful content, mobile performance, website speed, and technical quality. A website that gives clear answers, loads fast, and provides good user experience has a better chance of ranking well in search results [7], [14].

D. Future of SEO: Smart & Personalized Marketing

In the modern stage, SEO has become more advanced, intelligent, and user oriented. Search engines no longer depend only on exact keywords; instead, they try to understand the meaning, context, and intention behind every search query. This change has made SEO more focused on user behavior, content relevance, and overall digital experience [8], [14], [15].

One major development in this stage is the increasing use of AI-driven personalization. Search engines now provide results according to the user's location, search history, interests, and online behavior. This means that different users may get different search results for the same query based on their personal needs and preferences [9], [10], [20].

Another important feature of modern SEO is semantic search. It helps search engines understand the deeper meaning of words and phrases rather than only matching keywords. Because of this, content should be written in a clear, meaningful, and topic-focused manner. Along with text-based search, visual search and voice search are also becoming popular. Users can now search by speaking or by using images, which has increased the need for natural language content and image optimization [13]–[15].

SEO is also becoming more connected with other digital platforms. Social media platforms now support brand visibility, content sharing, audience engagement, and traffic generation. Similarly, predictive analytics helps businesses understand future user behavior and search trends. Overall, modern SEO combines artificial intelligence, semantic understanding, voice and visual search, social media, and data analytics to create a more personalized and effective search experience [8], [12], [16].

VI. ROLE OF SEO IN DIGITAL MARKETING EVOLUTION

SEO has evolved from a technical trick into a strategic pillar of digital marketing [6], [7], [14]:

TABLE II. EVOLUTION OF SEO AND ITS
CHANGING ROLE IN SEARCH OPTIMIZATION

Stage	Role of SEO
Early	Visibility through keywords
Middle	Content-driven ranking
Modern	User experience & intent optimization
Future	AI-powered personalization

Key notes- SEO is no longer just about ranking higher—it is about [6], [7]:

- Delivering valuable content [1], [6]
 - Understanding user behaviour [3], [9], [20]
 - Adapting to search engine algorithms [7], [13], [14]
- In the evolution of digital marketing, SEO has shifted from manipulation → optimization → experience-

driven strategy, making it one of the most critical components of modern online marketing [6], [7], [14].

VII. CONCLUSION

The study on Evolution of digital marketing has mainly focused on the growth of digital marketing from traditional marketing, the various causes and inventions that led for the digitalization of traditional form of marketing, the benefits derived from marketers during pandemic, the role digitalization has played to unite marketers and customers has been thoroughly studied. This paper also has been written by studying various articles on the current scenario of digital marketing and the various prospects the future holds for both marketers and customers to make use of the tools, strategies and values derived out of digitalization on the internet basis. Digital marketing has evolved from simple online ads to a complex ecosystem driven by data, personalization, and emerging technologies. Businesses that embrace innovation, ethical data practices, and customer-centric strategies are more likely to thrive. Future research should explore the long-term impact of AI and immersive technologies on marketing effectiveness [3], [8], [23], [25].

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