

A DISCUSSION ON IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DIGITAL MARKETING WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

The global pandemic COVID-19 has proved to be a great challenge for the world which has brought changes in the priority of human beings across the globe. People have become more sensitive in taking care of their health. The pandemic caused significant changes in the world socially as well as economically. People had to have stayed alone to maintain social distancing. The pandemic has compelled businesses to transition from traditional ways to online to showcase their products and services. The pandemic made people think about the basic necessity of digital marketing in everyone's life as the virus created lots of uncertainties among customers and marketers with respect to health, social life, economic stability, employment and so on. During the outbreak of the pandemic, people got abundant free time to spend on digital platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Amazon and Flipkart etc. Businesses have to depend upon such digital technologies to survive for a long time. The paper makes an attempt to examine the impact of Covid-19 on digital marketing with reference to India. The paper has also tried to throw some lights on future prospects of digital marketing.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; COVID-19; Pandemic; Digital Media; Marketer.

INTRODUCTION:

On the planet everyone has been affected by the outbreak of the global coronavirus disease (COVID 19). In the history of mankind for the first time more than 70 percent of nations including developed, developing and underdeveloped nations have been under lockdown. The virus has caused huge unrest in the global economy. With respect to health, social life, economic stability and employment etc., the pandemic created multiple uncertainties among people which brought lots of behavioural changes such as working remotely, spending a lot of time indoors, adapting to home-schooling, increasing attention to health and hygiene, avoiding crowds, increasing social media engagement, shifting towards online contents etc. And prevalence of such changes on digital platforms creates huge opportunities for marketers to scale up digital marketing and advertising to create digital contents and brands to digitally communicate with customers more than ever before as there has been an increase in social media engagement and the desire for digital contents and thereby increase earning opportunities during the outspread of Covid-19. The digital marketing strategy was easy and top most-demand to promote brands or digital contents and survive with safety precautions at that time.

As per reports, around 4.48 billion people have been active on the internet, which is around 58 per cent of the global population, as of October 2019. Today's world people have gradually been adjusting to digital transformation, online video conferencing software 'Zoom' reports the growth of around 78 percent profit, Google Meet report reports around 60 percent increase in user traffic, where people are spending 2 billion minutes meeting online every day (Kim, 2020).

The outbreak of Covid-19 gave digital marketing and advertising an unexpected boost to grow at a steady pace as the people were locked down at home which accelerated a fast pace behaviour shifting people towards digital platforms, digital media, and digital content. Digital marketing offers new marketing channels with traditional marketing for marketers that involves strategies to adopt digital updated technologies for promotions and advertising to different platforms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Nielsen (2020) conducted research during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic on shopper behaviour which started in China and later expanded to other countries that have also been affected by the widespread of the virus. While the virus spread and reached the general public across the world, they monitored consumer trends and found out that consumers have been through six different behavioural stages based on their awareness of the Covid-19 spread in their communities. These are: Proactive health – minded buying, Reactive health management, Pantry preparation, Quarantined living preparation, Restricted living, Living a new normal.

Kotler and Armstrong (2009) in a book titled “Marketing: An Introduction” stated that digital marketing is a form of direct marketing which electronically connects the consumers with the sellers with the help of various interactive digital technologies such as email, websites, online forums and newsgroups, interactive television, cellular communications and so on.

Purkayastha and Sharma (2016) in a paper titled “Gaining competitive advantage through the right business model: Analysis based on case studies” mentioned that digital marketing is one of the mediums which provides opportunities for businesses to gain economic value through collaboration with stakeholders, customers and employees using digital technologies.

Gowsalya, Mangaiyarkarasi and Vethirajan (2020) stated that as a fast growing marketing sector, companies are using digital marketing for competitive advantage in India. The success of digital marketing campaigns can only be achieved by harnessing capabilities of various marketing techniques available in both conventional and modern marketing. As people are engaging with the application of various social media platforms, the expanding utilization of such online networking are making new open doors for digital marketers to attract the clients through digital platforms.

Banica, Brinzea and Radulescu (2015) mentioned that the internet is fundamental in the growth of digital marketing because marketers apply the internet as a marketing tool for financial success. The internet is used as a powerful way to reach various markets for business expansion and it helps foster communication with visibility and online sales channels and social media advertising.

Ayush and Gowda (2020) pointed out that the outbreak of the Covid-19 has compelled businesses to transition from conventional ways to online to showcase their brands, products and services. The pandemic, in fact, has helped businesses in promoting products and services through various digital platforms as the engagement of people on social media has risen at a higher rate. Such behavioural shifting towards digital platforms and digital contents created ample opportunities for the marketers to digitally connect with people more than ever before.

Keegan and Rowley (2017) stated that technological advances create a lot of opportunities for marketers to expand business by evaluating data and applying the information and increase their productivity.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present study tries to address the following objectives:

1. To study the concept of digital marketing.
2. To examine the impact of Covid-19 on digital marketing with reference to India.
3. To Identify and analyze the future prospect of digital marketing post Covid-19.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The present study is made on the impact of COVID-19 on digital marketing in which descriptive methodology will be used in the analysis process. The present study is based on the secondary sources of data. The data collected for the study are from various authentic sources including research papers, journals, books, magazines, government official publications, newspapers, different websites etc.

DIGITAL MARKETING:

The term ‘Digital Marketing’ has been well known since the 1990s and got more recognized in the late 2000s, but the pandemic COVID-19 has expedited the pace of the growth of digital marketing. Today digital marketing has become a global phenomenon that unites mass adjustment and distribution to achieve marketing goals.

With the help of internet and digital technologies such as computers, mobile phones, websites, social media platforms, software application, email and other digital platforms, digital marketing is a branch of marketing to promote products and services among people.

More specifically digital marketing is an online active marketing promotion of brands or products and services through the use of various digital media platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Amazon, and Flipkart etc. In the words of Wendy (2019), digital marketing is a means of promoting goods & services and brands using digital technologies, especially taking advantage of the internet. The speeding development of the digital world has accelerated digital marketing to carry out branding and advertising. Royle and Laing (2014) stated that digital marketing is the use of digital technology to create integrated, targeted and measurable communications that help to obtain and retain customers while building deeper relationships with customers for products or brands.

As digital marketing is target specific, marketers target a specific segment of people based on various factors. Marketers must identify the perfect medium of channel for connecting with people, since digital marketing is also interactive in nature. Using various digital media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter etc., marketers can connect with people for feedback which enables an interactive two-way communication between marketers and people.

In the digital age, businesses use digital marketing as promotional activity and advertising market searching through online digital media by utilizing various means such as social networking where businesses face new challenges and opportunities. Digital marketing is a form of market which is the utilization of electronic media by the marketers to promote brands, products or services among the people. The main objective of digital marketing is to attract people and interact with them without any

geographic or time constraints to promote brands and products with the help of different digital technologies such as internet and computers, mobile phones, websites, social media, software, email and other systems etc.

COMPONENTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING:

After the outbreak of the virus, approaches of people towards traditional marketing have been falling over the last few months as the engagement of people with brands and marketing activities through digital platforms has considerably been increased. The constant increase in such engagement of people has led to the development of various digital marketing components.

1. Search Engine Optimization (SEO):

SEO is the process of improving the quality and quantity of website traffic to the website or webpage organically to increase its visibility when people search for products or brands related to your business in search engines. Google search engine can be optimized in such a way that whenever people search something related to your products or brands, the website link would appear at the top in the organic result section. The better visibility your sites have in search results, the more you are to get attention and attraction from people to your products or brands.

2. Social Media:

One of the most prominently useful tools for digital marketing is social media platforms. Actually it is the use of various social media platforms and websites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Amazon and Flipkart etc. to promote products or brands. Today's world social media marketing is an easy and useful tool to increase attention because most of the time people are busy on social media platforms.

3. Email:

It is simply the act of sending emails of products and brands to people. Email can be used as a tool by marketers to directly target people by sending commercial messages for promoting products or brands.

4. Video:

Another strategy for promoting digital marketing is video which has been gaining a number of customer engagements over the last few years. Video streaming platforms like YouTube are highly useful to promote brands, products and services among people.

5. Content Creation:

In an era of the internet, content creation has become an integral part of digital marketing. It is something which is primarily focused on creating, publishing and distributing contents for people through online. It is used by marketers in order to achieve their targets such as attracting attention, promoting and increasing products or brands awareness, engaging with online communities and increasing sales through online.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DIGITAL MARKETING:

The impact of COVID-19 has been global, regional and local in every sphere of life. People faced multiple uncertainties surrounding health, social, and economic stability. The virus brought lots of behavioural changes among people such as work from home, spending a lot of time indoors, increasing attention to health and hygiene, increasing social media engagement, shifting towards online contents etc. Such changing of people's habits causes marketers and advertisers to rethink the existing marketing efforts.

The widespread use of the virus has had a drastic negative impact on conventional marketing activities because of the lockdown. However, it created opportunities for digital marketing because people have been shifting to digital media engagement at a faster pace. Digital marketing has scaled up its growth charts over the last few years. Some major impacts of COVID-19 on digital marketing are outlined as below:

a) Increasing social media engagement accelerated the growth of social media marketing:

The global pandemic COVID-19 has brought changes in the priority of human beings across the world. Due to Covid-19 outbreak people got ample free time to spend on digital platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Amazon and Flipkart etc. because people had to have stayed alone at home to maintain social distance. The prevalence of people on such digital platforms creates ample opportunities for marketers to scale up digital marketing and advertising to create digital contents and brands to digitally communicate with customers more than ever before as there has been an increase in social media engagement and the desire for digital contents.

b) Rising demand for video and micro-video contents:

As a result of the widespread use of the virus, people had to work from home through online mode. There has been an increased demand for video streaming platforms and micro-video content platforms as people have ample free time to spend on due to imposing lockdown. The digital platforms like YouTube have received tremendous growth over the last few years. The

pandemic brought opportunities for marketers to create video and micro-video contents for advertisement and promotion of their brands, products and services.

c) Surge in demand for O.T.T. platforms content:

During the pandemic lockdown periods, there has been a surge in demand for Over-The-Top (O.T.T) platform contents because such content creation platforms came into the limelight for the sake of entertainment at home. The O.T.T. content hubs such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have made huge profits over the last few years. The speeding development of such O.T.T. platforms provides ample opportunities for promoting digital marketing business.

d) Increasing product research among customers:

After the widespread of the virus people found ample time to spend researching online about brands, products and services. The constant increase of people on digital platforms enables marketers to increase the quality of brands and manage their online reputation effectively and be responsible towards the customer reviews and requests to avoid any possible backlash, which, in turn, helps in effective growth of digital marketing.

e) Shifting from Key Performance Indicators (KPI) expectations to lifetime value:

Digital marketing has traditionally been based on analytics and Key Performance Indicators which measures the effectiveness and efficiency growth of digital marketing. However, the global pandemic has decreased the value of performance and emphasized focus on the importance of customer lifetime value.

f) Surge in demand for online creative contents:

It is something which is primarily focused on creating, publishing and distributing contents amongst people through online. The demand for online content has rapidly risen as people spend lots of time on digital platforms after the widespread corona virus. Online creative content has become an integral part of digital marketing. Marketers use it in order to achieve their targets such as attracting attention, promote products and brands credibility, engaging with online community to increase sales earning through online.

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN INDIA:

After the outbreak of COVID-19, digital marketing has become one of the best forms of marketing because people found a significant amount of time to engage with different digital media platforms. The development of digital technologies has transformed the world into a global village. Such development of technologies helps digital marketing activities to reach every corner of the world without any geographic or time constraints. There are many digital marketing techniques which should be applied in proper ways effectively.

a) Social Media marketing with responsibility:

The pandemic COVID-19 has brought ample changes in the priority of people. After the outbreak of the pandemic, engagement of people on various social media platforms has drastically been increasing as they find lots of time to spend on. Marketers are taking advantages from such people to scale up digital marketing. Going forward in the future the marketers have to ensure that they act with responsibility.

b) Email Marketing:

Email marketing is a form of the strategy that marketers usually send commercial messages through email to a list of potential customers to create awareness of the products and services. Compared to advertising or other forms of media exposures, email marketing is relatively low cost for a company to promote its brands, products and services by using this element of digital marketing easily. Email marketing is conducive for a company to bring complete attention of the customers by creating an attractive mix of graphics, text and links on the brands, products and services.

c) Online Advertising:

Another major important part of digital marketing is online advertising through which companies can deliver the message about the products or services to people. It can also be called internet advertising through which marketers create awareness about their brands, products or services on various websites and digital platforms so that people are able to receive information freely. Such internet-based advertising should be more effective and relevant so that the content and ads match best to consumer interests.

d) Rise in demand Artificial Intelligence based Chat-bots:

During lockdown periods, users of chat-bots have been increasing as the people found it as a useful service. In order to create awareness of goods and services by using an application installed on a computer, chat-bot is one of the tools used to communicate between the clients and the brands in modern days. Going ahead in the future, marketers will have to invest more on such artificial intelligence based technologies as there is an advantage for virtual assistant to the customers easily.

e) Affordable and Accessible to Global markets:

Being digital means being global as people can reach out to any corner of the world at any point of time through any digital platforms. Marketers are able to promote and create awareness of brands, products and services amongst the customers across the globe without any barriers with the help of different digital technologies. Thus, digital marketing is the most affordable and accessible media to the world using various digital platforms compared to other conventional marketing.

f) Influencer marketing:

One of the newest tools of digital marketing in today's digital world is social media influencers. With a substantial number of followers on various social media platforms, the influencers can recommend the brands and products or services to their followers. Research has found that around 93percent of advertising agencies take the help of influencers marketing to promote brands, goods and services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

a) The pandemic has brought lots of changes in the priority of people. The engagement of people on various social media platforms has drastically been increasing which is an advantage for marketers to promote their brands and products using different digital technologies. Going forward in the future the marketers have to ensure that they act with responsibility as privacy and security in social media is the most significant issue that people have experienced over the years.

b) Maintaining long lasting relationships with customers has always been an art of marketing. With an increase in engagement of people on various digital platforms, marketers will have to promote digital marketing with the utmost care. Otherwise, any mistakes committed by a company can lead to widespread negative information which, in turn, may lead to drastic backlash from people. Hence, maintaining online reputation should be top most priority at any cost.

c) Success of any business depends highly on how effectively a company has adopted new strategies and recognized the customer approach of marketing. The emergence of digitalization activities of marketing has been ample opportunities for marketers but they will be able to merge digital marketing with conventional methods for meeting the needs of customers in order to be successful.

d) Marketers must be careful of the contents that people usually demand. All the digital efforts of marketing activities should be the best for existing and attracting the new customers as attention, retention and encouragement from customers matter the most in order to be successful in marketing because there are varieties of brands, products and services available easily in digital platforms. In order to survive in digital platforms marketers should remember that good content is a valued extension to a brand.

e) Collaboration and innovation together with the world markets is one of the important issues that marketers in digital marketing must look at. With increasing choice and options, Research and development has become a part of any marketing activity which, in fact, can make the idea scalable. The working of all the departments together should be proactive to produce the reasonable output of the efforts done with digitalization.

CONCLUSION:

The technological advances have opened up new doors for the world. The Internet has various attractions and advantages for businesses and consumers. In the present scenario, digital platforms are an integral part of any economic activities. In order to implement marketing strategies properly, digital marketing has become an essential tool in the hands of marketers to expand marketing activities during the pandemic periods. Digital marketing has experienced a tremendous boost as social media marketing received increasing popularity to promote and advertise brands, products and services online using numerous social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram etc. Major advantage of social media marketing is that it is easy for marketers to attract and engage with people for increasing revenue as the number of users has risen on such digital platforms. Having a great commercial impact on the business, digital marketing is cost effective because the companies are able to reach targeted market places at a minimized cost. Going forward in the future the marketers have to ensure that they act with responsibility as privacy and security in digital media platforms is the most significant issue that people have experienced over the years.

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