

Digital Advertising and Its Role in Building Brand Image

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Abstract Globalization has contributed to increased competition in marketing especially in the field of advertising, an aspect that has made firms to focus on developing their brand image. The shift has been brought about by the introduction of new media channels, which include internet and social media. The process has therefore changed the way businesses conduct their marketing and branding as communication is embracing a multi-directional approach. This paper seeks to appreciate the concept of digital advertising as a marketing tool and its role in building brand image examining a number of examples of digital advertisements & discussing the digital advertising role in building and enhancing the brand image. The paper will as well acknowledge existing statistics on the topic and displaying some of the advertising samples that have adopted the practice.

Keywords: marketing, advertising, digital media, digital advertising, brand image

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1. Introduction

Globalization has contributed to increased competition, an aspect that has made firms to focus on developing their brand image. According to Aaker & Biel [1], advertising is perceived to play a key role in enhancing brand image, an aspect that has been echoed by different scholars over the years. Besides, some of the studies have suggested that advertising campaigns not only improve sales revenue to firms but also improve on brand equity [2]. Therefore, the benefits of embracing digital advertising are threefold; (1) enhance sales, (2) build on brand reputation and (3) enlighten the public on products. It is imperative to appreciate that branding and marketing have experienced significant changes in the recent past. The shift has been brought about by the introduction of new media channels, which include internet and social media. The process has therefore changed the way businesses conduct their marketing and branding as communication is embracing a multi-directional approach. This paper seeks to appreciate the concept of digital advertising and its role in building brand image.

To achieve the study objective, the paper will acknowledge existing statistics on the topic and appreciating some of the advertising samples that have adopted the practice.

2. Materials & Methods

This paper follows the methods of descriptive research studies using qualitative and archival data and results in examining and discussing the current topic.

3. Digital Marketing

The concept of digital marketing first emerged in the 1990s and gained increased recognition in 2000s and the 2010s [3]. Since its introduction, the approach has been perceived to be an efficient way of creating a sustainable relationship amid consumers and businesses. However, some scholars argue that though the term might not have been used till the 1990s, its evolution can be traced back to the mid-1980s [3]. Besides, some of the recognized pioneers of digital marketing include SoftAD Group which is currently termed as ChannelNet. The firm engaged in the advertisement of automobile companies, with use of floppy disks in sending out product information to different stakeholders.

The rapid evolution of digital media has made the approach to be appreciated by different scholars over the years. Besides, the technique (digital marketing) is perceived to create a lot of opportunities and avenues for advertising and marketing. Apparently, it is worth acknowledging that the practice was triggered by increased access to digital media. Additionally, there is a lot of literature to support the notion that digital marketing proved to experience a growing trend in 2012 and 2013.

By 2010, the growth of digital media was estimated to hit 4.5 trillion online ads, an aspect that made the sector to experience about 48% growth [3]. Some of the contributing factors include the fact that businesses are adopting Online Behavioral Advertising (OBA) to modify advertising for their target consumers in the market. However, OBA has experienced criticisms from different stakeholders concerning consumer privacy and data protection.

It is worth acknowledging that the concept of digital marketing has a different meaning to different stakeholders. While some recognize the idea as internet marketing or online marketing, other perceives digital marketing as web marketing. Nonetheless, the term has experienced significant popularity in different parts of the world [4].

Apparently, digital advertising is gaining increased recognition, and 2018 is not an exception. Besides, Hainla [5] asserts that in this year alone, social media has been appreciated as the most vital element of digital marketing. Most of the adults aged 18-34 has been found to follow their brands in the social media platforms and they add up to about 95% [5]. Additionally, another scholar has sited that 71% of consumers with good experience in social media are likely to recommend their brands to colleagues via social media networking. Globally, there are about 2.56 billion mobile social media users hence firms have a large potential to enhance their brand awareness in the target market [5]. Besides, different approaches have proved effective in measuring effectiveness of digital advertising in the creating brand awareness.

Efficient platforms used in the process of digital marketing include search engine optimization, social media optimization, e-mail marketing and search engine marketing. Digital marketing platforms include Google Ad words, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn among others. These tools help firms to engage with different customers in the market in an efficient manner. With digital presence, organizations can efficiently connect with their target customers in the market. On the other hand, customers can also give their views and recommendations concerning products. Businesses are thus left with the mandate of responding to the set queries for them to remain relevant in the market.

The digital marketing platform as suggested by Mobbs [6] improves communication with different stakeholders, hence an effective means of managing customer relations. Businesses can, therefore, achieve increased customer awareness through the combination of various digital marketing activities. By improving their customer perception in the market, firms can efficiently gain brand awareness and brand image, an aspect that will impact positively on business.

However, different scholars are concerned that while developing a digital marketing process, it is essential to maintain proper pace and quality. This will attract more customer base, thus contributed to improved consumer perception. Nevertheless, the social media platforms as echoed by different scholars have added to customer attraction and retention.

Additionally, it is worth appreciating that digital marketing has a different impact on different sectors of the economy. The process has been made possible with the increased incidence of interconnectivity, an aspect that has been made possible the recent use of the internet.

With increased innovation, internet marketing has proved to be useful in the recent past as businesses are embracing online strategies in their advertising campaigns. The present era is characterized by increased competition, high level of innovation and use of social media platforms in advertising campaigns. Therefore, for firms to remain relevant in the market, they have to embrace digital marketing strategies.

4. Brand Image

According to Business Dictionary brand image is defined as "The impression in the consumers' mind of a brand's total personality (real and imaginary qualities and short comings)". Brand image is developed over time through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme, and is authenticated through the consumers' direct experience [7].

According to Mallia & Windels [8] digital advertising contributes to increased brand recognition in the market. Moreover, digital advertising impacts differently to businesses, an aspect that has been appreciated. Some of the significant benefits of digital marketing to a company include the following; Realize online reach – recent innovations are recognized by different scholars for creating new pathways for firms to interact with their target consumers in the market. Besides, the internet is appreciated as a useful platform through which target consumers can reach out for their brand makers, an aspect that is made possible through its ability to influence the brand image.

Moreover, digital marketing has been perceived to boost sales, as innovation has opened doors to increased use of different social media platforms. Businesses can, therefore, connect with new groups of consumers in the market. For instance, firms with online stores have been found to experience increased sales as compared as businesses become more feasible in the market. This makes the tactic to be appreciated for its effectiveness in contributing to direct increase in sales. The emergence of social media has proved to have diverse marketing opportunities for businesses, especially in enhancing brand awareness. Besides, the ranking of a business website in the search engine has a direct influence on brand recognition.

When integrated into the search engine optimization, social media is understood to create organic traffic, an aspect that enhances product recognition [9]. Besides, firms enjoy a vast range of social media advertising techniques, an issue that can be used in promoting product campaigns in the market. Some of the essential statistics that appreciates the fact that social media marketing is more of a need include the following;

- About 76% of firms going global are using social networking in realizing their marketing objectives [9].
- Besides, firms that have adopted the digital marketing technique have realized over 133% growth in sales, an aspect that shows a positive correlation amid product marketing and revenue.
- In the US alone, about 40% of online shoppers buy products from the online store.

From this study, it is evident that digital marketing has a wide range of benefits to users, more so firms seeking to gain global recognition in the current competitive setting. Businesses are turning to the use of growing social signals, which have proved effective for most businesses. With social signals, social media users can share, like and recommend product information to potential consumers in the online platforms. This gives firms a competitive edge, making them relevant in the market.

5. Digital Advertising

Advertising in the traditional media differs significantly from the digital media. Besides, with the conventional approach, firms experience different challenges which include high cost, and valueless contacts among other issues. However, the traditional approach has been found to rely on different models. Furthermore, communication in this type of advertising is usually one way which has been found to be ineffective as compared to the digital advertising, especially in the 21st century where social media usage has gained popularity.

Digital capability is becoming more necessary for businesses that are seeking to build or enhance their brands through brand building programs. Thus digital communications is a powerful tool for brands and with many brand-building benefits as shown in **Figure 1**:

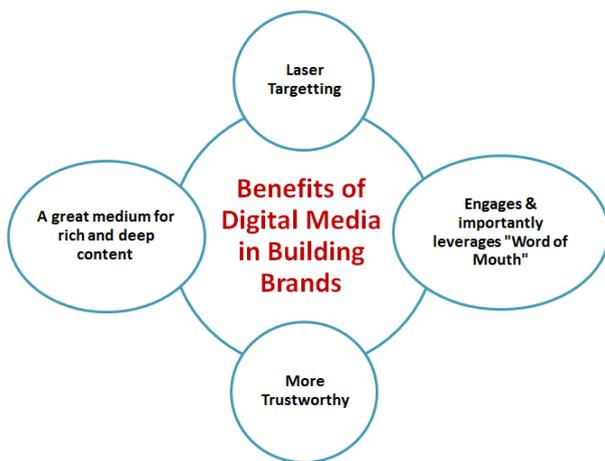


Figure 1. The Benefits of Digital Media in Building Brands

Accordingly, digital advertising becomes multi-directional and real-time, an aspect that allows firms to engage with their target consumers more efficiently. The emergence of the internet and social media has changed the manner in which communication is attained in most businesses. For instance, with social media, it is evident from the study that users can effectively engage in direct communication with a brand. This makes digital marketing an ideal platform for consumers to establish a sustainable relationship with brands as well as word of mouth marketing which is effective in building brand image.

With the introduction of social media, it is possible for users to share content, links, and comments in a multi-directional way with their target consumers in the market. Facebook remains to the world's most renowned social media platform.

The rationale of including social media channels in marketing programs is usually to enhance business interaction with their target customers as well as improve on product sales. Besides, the number of social media active users is vast and growing, making it an attraction for most businesses. Moreover, the recent introduction of smartphones has contributed to increase in digital marketing.

The benefits of these digital attributes are supported by global consumer brand perception research conducted by Nielsen in 2012 which showed that:

- 92% of consumers stating they trust earned media, such as word of mouth and recommendations from friends and family, above other forms of advertising. This is an increase of 18% since 2007.
- Online consumer reviews were the second most trusted form of advertising with 70% of global consumers surveyed online indicating they trust this platform, an increase of 15% in four years
- 58% of global online consumers trust "owned media," such as messages on company websites, and 50 percent find content in emails they consented to receive to be credible.

Digital channels offer ways to connect with target consumers and leverage their goodwill creating positive brand experiences that will help build the brand's equity. [10]

Accordingly there are 4 main roles digital communications may play in brand-building as shown in (**Figure 2**):

- 1-Amplify the brand offer
- 2- Support the brand offer
- 3- Create a brand building platform
- 4-Amplify the brand building platform



Figure 2. The Brand Building Role of Digital Communications

Through the usual recommendation, users in the digital world especially in the social media cycles can efficiently enhance product recognition thus brand recognition. This strategy has proved to be effective in boosting product marketing, an aspect that contributes to increased product recognition. Besides, with more appreciation, more people will be attracted to using the marketed product, an aspect that will impact positively on brand recognition & business growth.

Furthermore, the literature indicates that digital marketers are turning towards increased use of social media, an aspect that has been triggered by the recent change in consumer behavior [11]. For instance, statistics indicate that a significant amount of consumers spend at least 37 minutes a day on different social media platforms such as Facebook, and Twitter among others [9]. This shows the

potential market that can be used by firms embracing different social media platforms in the marketing plans.

Some of the significant aspects to note while using social media include the fact that most firms share and like product images, to enhance product awareness. Therefore, the technique is useful for most business seeking to grow their recognition in the market. Besides, image content has gained increased recognition for the social media users.

For decades now, most business embracing digital marketing has observed that email marketing is effective in enhancing brand recognition in the market. Besides, scholars have aired their concerns that the technique remains relevant despite the recent changes experienced in the digital marketing world.

Mallia & Windels [8] assert that marketers appreciate the impact of regular contact on consumer relationships. Besides, the logic behind marketing is gaining a new dimension as marketers are seeking for more integrated approaches which create increased connectivity and enhanced relationships. Increased innovation and the recent emergence of new marketing channels have contributed to the current shift in marketing behavior.

Parvatiyar & Sheth [12] in their article suggest that there are different strategies through which firms can interact with their consumers in the market, and they are different regarding cost and effectiveness. Therefore, cost efficiency and marketing effectiveness make the digital marketing attractive to most businesses. Besides, firms can achieve get in touch with their target consumers more frequently, an aspect that leads to increased customer loyalty.

Through the different digital marketing techniques, firms make their consumers informed with most recent information on their product offering. Some of the tools used to achieve the above objective include newsletters and purchase reminders which are sent to customers. An example of a firm using the digital marketing includes Lensmart which send its loyal customers email reminders to inform them of their new products or when they suspect that may demand more supply [13]. The firm uses a customer database to achieve the objective, an aspect that has proved effective in supporting business growth. Besides, the technique allows the business to sell cost-effectively to its existing customer base while attracting new consumers through improved customer loyalty.

Recent studies have shown that customers are co-producers of value; hence they play a significant role in digital marketing. Moreover, the interaction attained when using digital advertising provides customers with an opportunity to interact with a brand, thus getting more information concerning the product. The process is also understood to offer customers with more information about consumer needs, preferences, and interests. Multinational firms such as McDonalds are using different online strategies in enhancing their brand recognition.

Digital channels are preferred by most customers as they allow customers to engage in active creation and shaping of brand communication. The objective is made possible as consumers have a chance to air their opinions on content preferences as well as a channel to use. The process leaves marketers with a chance to develop personal brand communication, a strategy that creates brand loyalty.

Besides the augmented use of digital marketing strategies and increased research in the area, it is worth recognizing that there are limited models that can be used to explain how the strategy works, more so in creating customer loyalty. Some of the significant models employed to date include customer relationship management (CRM) and Relationship management (RM). Hence, there is need to develop more models in the future to explain the significance of the tool in enhancing brand recognition in the current competitive setting.

6. Examples of Digital Ads

6.1. Electronic Billboards

This represents a digital version of the traditional billboard ads and offers businesses to convey a lot of information through the platform. They are preferred because of their ability to provide marketers with an opportunity to change their advertising message throughout the day. Besides, the technique has proved to be cost-effective as different ads can be put on the billboard. Furthermore, they are flexible as markers can use different designs with frequent change of the advertising message.

6.2. Web-Based Marketing

This is another type of digital marketing that utilizes the internet in enhancing product awareness. The approach mainly targets the internet users as ads keep on popping up in their websites as new windows with the advertising messages. With increased innovation, video advertisement has also been introduced, an area that has gained increased recognition in the recent past.

6.3. Mobile Ads

Mobile advertising is type of advertising that appears on mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets that have wireless connections. As a subset of mobile marketing, mobile advertising can take place as text ads via SMS, or banner advertisements that appear embedded in web sites, in downloaded apps or in mobile games. Mobile technology used by companies such as Google and Facebook tailor mobile advertisements based on individual's web browsing history, geographic location, and with data collected by shopping habits. Because mobile devices typically have smaller screens than computers or laptops, this form of digital advertising is usually optimized for small displays by being concise [14].

6.4. Viral Marketing

This includes the use of email and other online platforms in advertising brand awareness, more so in the case of word of mouth ads.

6.5. Audio Advertising

Some of the avenues to achieve audio advertising include Podcasts and internet radio among others.

7. Examples of Digital Ads Building Brand Image and Identity

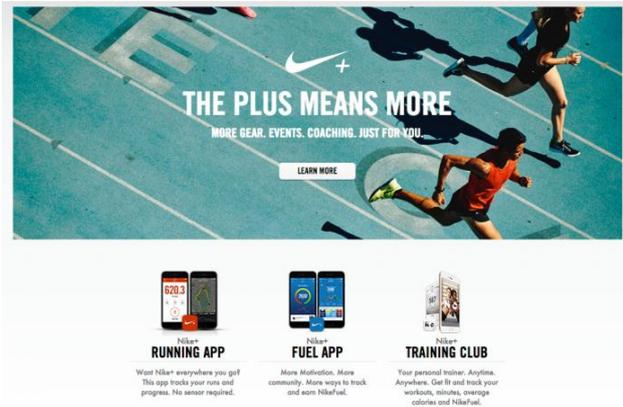


Figure 3. Showing digital ad for Nike+ creating additional digital brand benefits

Digital programs can amplify the offer by communicating the additional benefits available. The consumer goods brand Nike offers Nike+ connect with a chip embedded in shoes that provide a record of activity and performance.

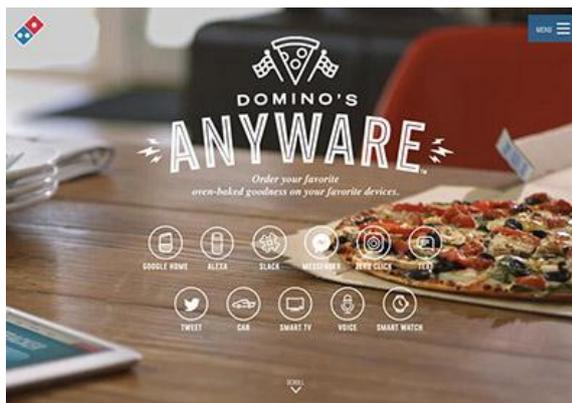


Figure 4. Showing digital ad for Domino's Pizza Chain

Domino's has been widely regarded for its marketing brilliance ever since their 2009-2010 turn around. And recently they've been showing no signs of slowing down. Their recent "Domino's "Anyware" has earned them headline after headline in major publications like Forbes, Wired, and Cnet, and publications like Fast Company are going as far as saying that Domino's now looks more like

a tech company than just a pizza chain. This digital campaign had a great impact on Domino's brand image and awareness regarding internet exposure. The goal of the campaign was to make their pizza as easy to order as possible from any of your favorite tech hardware.

TeComm's organizers announced that they will bring know-how from eBay, Alibaba and Exponea to the e-commerce event in Bucharest, scheduled to take place on March 7-8. The event was to gather together over 300 e-shops owners, e-commerce professionals, influencers and important players from the specialized industry.

Alibaba Group is a Chinese multinational organization which has proved successful in using the digital platform in advertising products. Since 2015, the firm has experienced significant improvement in its digital market share which has improved by about 33.7% as shown in (Figure 7).



Figure 5. Showing a digital poster for an event by TeComm

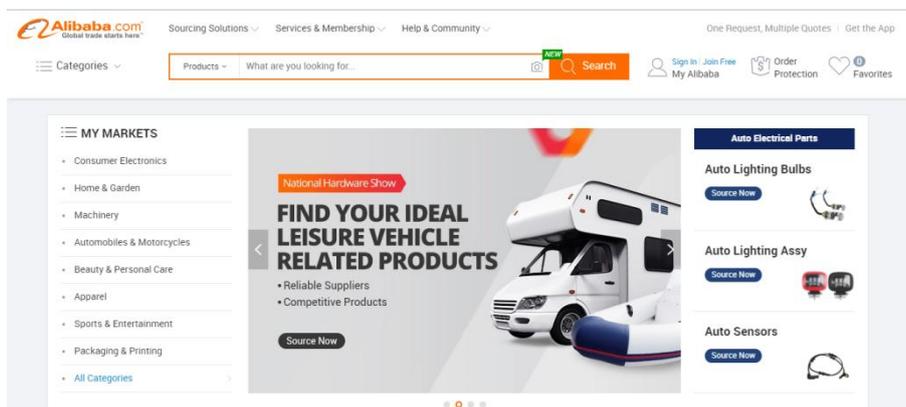


Figure 6. Showing a digital web banner Ad from National Hardware Show

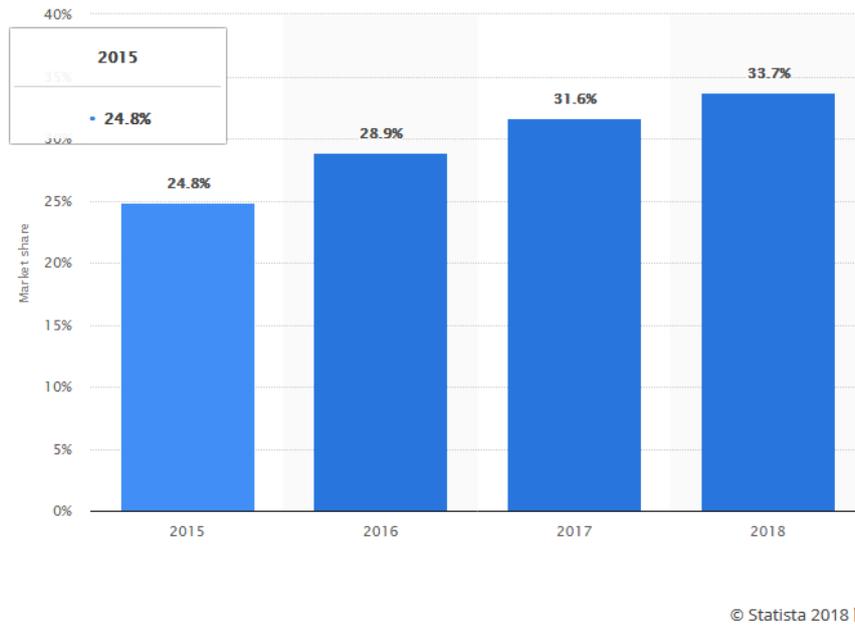


Figure 7. Showing Alibaba’s Digital Market Share



Figure 8. Denny’s “Overwhelming Existential Dread”, Twitter amplifying the brand building platform

The Denny's diner chain latched on to a popular meme—inviting people to zoom in on a photo, then sending them on a scavenger hunt around the image for more hidden messages—to produce this stellar tweet (Figure 8).

8. Conclusion

From this study, it is evident that digital marketing impacts positively on businesses as the strategy helps in cutting down on cost. Cost minimization is achieved through the transformation of traditional marketing to the adoption of the current marketing mix (offline and online) strategies which have proved useful. However, most businesses are focusing on the use of online marketing, especially with the increased use of social media in the recent past.

Additionally, online marketing is attractive because of its ability to create product awareness because of ability

for marketers to reach a vast amount of consumers within a short time. Therefore, such a promotion directly contributes to an increase in product sales, which can be achieved through effective customer targeting. Ads placed in traditional media channels such as newspapers and magazines are different to review market penetration as compared to digital marketing. Digital marketing on the hand allows marketers to achieve a 100% right targeting, which is necessary for businesses.

Besides, with an established brand, firms will no longer need to rely on the media for achieving their marketing functions. Consumers can efficiently search for their preferred brands online via the different social media platforms. This will not only lead to improved sales for the business but will lead to increased brand recognition in the market. For firms to retain their competitive edge in the market, brand and image awareness plays a vital role. Digital marketing has been appreciated over the years for its ability to accelerate marketing activities to different extents, an aspect that offers firms with vast opportunities.

Besides, digital marketing adopts a wide range of technologies with the primary tool being the internet. The process thus enables organizations to get in touch with millions of customers within a short duration of time.

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