



## The Evolution of Marketing in the Digital Age: Trends , Challenges , and Opportunities

### La evolución del mercadeo en la era digital: Tendencias, desafíos y oportunidades.

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#### Summary

This text analyzes the evolution of marketing in the digital age, highlighting its trends, challenges, and opportunities. It establishes the context and relevance of the topic, while identifying the challenges faced by companies, especially small and medium-sized ones, in adopting digital marketing strategies. Subsequently, key concepts such as digitalization, digital marketing, and artificial intelligence are reviewed. This study was developed through a qualitative and exploratory approach. The results and analysis emphasize the importance of training and selecting suitable tools for business success. The discussion and conclusion highlight the need for adaptation and innovation in digital marketing, as well as addressing challenges related to tool adoption and training, and exploring artificial intelligence-related topics.

**Key words:** Artificial Intelligence, Digitalization, Digital Marketing, Training.

#### Resumen

El presente texto analiza la evolución del mercadeo en la era digital, destacando sus tendencias, desafíos y oportunidades. Se establece el contexto y la relevancia del tema, mientras que en la situación problemática se identifican los desafíos que enfrentan las empresas, especialmente las pequeñas y medianas, en la adopción de estrategias de mercadeo digital. Posteriormente se revisan conceptos clave como la digitalización, el marketing digital y la inteligencia artificial. Se ha desarrollado a través de un enfoque cualitativo y alcance exploratorio. Los resultados y análisis resaltan la importancia de la capacitación y selección de herramientas idóneas para el éxito empresarial. La discusión y conclusión destacan la necesidad de adaptación e innovación en el mercadeo digital, así como la importancia de abordar los desafíos relacionados con la adopción de herramientas y la capacitación además de dar línea a temas relacionados con la inteligencia artificial.

**Palabras claves:** Capacitación, Digitalización, Inteligencia artificial, Mercadeo digital.



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## 1. Introduction

The advancement of digital technologies has profoundly redefined marketing strategies globally. As Hinings et al. (2018) state in Delgado (2021), “Digital transformation arises from the combined effects of various digital innovations that generate new actors, structures, practices, values, and beliefs that change, threaten, replace, or complement the existing rules within organizations, ecosystems, industries, or sectors” (p. 5). Over the last decade, the use of digital platforms and technological tools has revolutionized how companies connect with their customers, opening up new opportunities and challenges for marketing professionals. This phenomenon, in addition to impacting the business sphere, represents a cross-cutting change in society, altering daily life and human interactions at various levels. Digitalization occurs, and from its application, digital marketing emerges.

This reflective document aims to analyze how digitalization has transformed marketing strategies, ushering in the digital age and identifying the challenges and opportunities this presents for businesses in the current context. To achieve this goal, the following specific objectives are set: first, to examine the main trends in digital marketing and their impact on the relationship between businesses and consumers; and second, to reflect on the challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) when adopting digital marketing strategies, highlighting potential solutions or strategic adaptations.

In an increasingly competitive and globalized environment, companies that do not adopt digital marketing strategies risk falling behind. Understanding these new dynamics has become a key factor in remaining competitive, as consumers have opted for new ways of consuming, hence the relevance of addressing this issue. Mujica et al., in 2020, present a position that recognizes that traditional media have become less appealing, as digital information sources, for example, are more abundant and require less effort to access.

Similarly, addressing these topics is relevant because communication, promotion, and channel definition are impactful and relevant aspects of marketing strategy development. In other words, individuals in business-related fields must be familiar with these topics and demonstrate the ability to adapt to change and implement new activities. Furthermore, given that the current environments in which marketing graduates find themselves demand a solid professional foundation aligned with the demands of increasingly competitive markets, it is essential for professionals to strategically deploy their skills to successfully enter the workforce ( Garcia et al., 2021).

The creation of academic documents like this, following a scientific approach, has a significant impact on both academia and society. For universities, it is essential to generate up-to-date knowledge about marketing trends and challenges in the digital age, reinforcing their role as educators of professionals capable of adapting to the dynamics of the business environment. In this sense, this work encourages business schools to review and adjust their curricula, ensuring they are aligned with the real needs of the market. By analyzing how digitalization transforms marketing strategies and ushers in the digital age,

this study allows academic programs, such as the Marketing Management Technology program, to offer their students practical tools and knowledge that prepare them to face the challenges of today's job market.

Furthermore, reflecting on the challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in adopting digital strategies transcends the educational sphere, also offering benefits to society at large. By addressing how businesses can adapt to and leverage the opportunities of the digital environment, this study not only fosters business competitiveness but also contributes to improving interaction between businesses and consumers, facilitating a greater understanding and use of new technological tools. This analysis, therefore, provides a benchmark for both academia and industry, promoting a comprehensive approach that responds to the challenges of the present and the digital future within a relevant and realistic context. Similarly, Laurent and Violante (2020) propose that the references used in class should be relevant to the business cases within their context (Calixto, 2022, p. 73) to generate meaning.

## **1.1 Problematic situation**

Currently, companies face a constantly evolving marketing environment, driven by the accelerated advancement of digital technologies; operational efficiency is achieved, there are better communication channels that improve the consumer experience, and innovation in services and products has been fostered (Pérez, et al., 2024).

This phenomenon has modified not only how organizations interact with their customers, but also the very structure of traditional marketing strategies. Changes are occurring in all actions, from customer profiling and channel definition to promotional strategies and logistics management (Diaz, 2023). Interpreting Da Silva and Núñez's 2021 argument, despite the evident advantages offered by the digital age, such as access to a greater amount of data on consumer behavior and the possibility of personalizing interactions by creating more precise profiles and segments, for example, using social media metrics, many companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), face significant challenges in adapting their marketing strategies to the current landscape. This is because the advances that have led to the digital age have occurred at an accelerated pace, with changes happening almost daily.

One of the main challenges lies in the lack of understanding and training in digital tools that would allow these companies to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the digital environment. Many companies maintain traditional marketing practices such as 100% in-store customer service, distribution and contact from a single physical location, and no or only in-store promotion, among others. While these practices may have been effective in the past, they are insufficient in a market where consumers demand immediacy, personalization, and access to real-time information. This can not only limit their competitiveness but could also jeopardize their long-term viability, as various texts have already stated that only those who adapt will be able to remain in the market.

Additionally, information overload and the diversity of digital platforms further complicate strategic decision-making; “Due to this wide range of topics, applications, etc., it has become difficult to distinguish between the approaches of each group of companies and, consequently, the possibility of directing public policies or training programs by sector” (Beltrán & Neira, 2021, p. 3). Small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, often lack the resources and infrastructure necessary to implement digital marketing strategies effectively, which can lead to an inefficient use of their budgets and efforts, as they fail to design strategies and actions that impact the desired target group. Note from the above that a good product or service capable of satisfying needs and desires is not enough; it requires the development of an entire ecosystem leveraging digital tools, improving analog or manual processes (Bustos & Mancera, 2023)

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This section is dedicated to explaining how this transformation in marketing occurs, from a theoretical foundation.

Marketing is as old as humanity itself, and its dynamics demonstrate this (Marketeros 2021). This is further validated by its nature as a field of study, which consists of satisfying needs and desires; indeed, "marketing has adapted to all periods of humanity" (Sánchez, et al., 2022, p. 1653). In its early stages, this satisfaction was achieved autonomously, progressing through a period of bartering, until it became established and refined into what we know today as commerce, involving a large number of variables.

Historically, marketing has aimed to ensure that products and services are available in the market, accessible to people according to their purchasing power, to satisfy their needs and desires. This includes the existence of retail stores, shopping centers, direct sales channels, and others. “Previously, a company started with its product, used promotion and sales as its marketing strategy, and aimed to maximize profits through sales volume” (Economics, 1990, p. 105); today, “discussing digital marketing requires addressing the global digital transformation, which can be considered the fourth industrial revolution” (Purizanca, 2024, p. 98).

The dynamics have changed with the digital age; digitization is a social and technological phenomenon that has transformed all areas of people's daily lives and the business world, because:

In recent years, the use of the internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs <sup>1</sup>) has led to the configuration of a new economy, where globalization has given way to this concept that has revolutionized the way experiences are created and consumed. (Zamarreño, 2021, p. 258).

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<sup>1</sup>According to Perdomo in 2022, ICTs, information and communication technologies, are part of the modern social context.

It also refers to the process of converting analog information and processes into digital formats, allowing for faster and more efficient access to data and resources. As such, it's important to mention that digitization initially occurred, and from its application to the business context, digital marketing emerged.

This change not only affects marketing but has also reconfigured communication, operational, and management dynamics across various industries, enabling companies to be more flexible and adaptive. This facilitates innovation and continuous improvement in their processes with data arriving more promptly and through diverse communication channels, which can then be processed more efficiently using software and hardware tools. This process accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as it stimulated the use of the aforementioned devices ( Selwyn et al., 2022).

According to Castaño & Jurado (2016), the arrival of online technology generated a change in the way we communicate and relate to each other. Digital marketing has emerged as a solution to new technologies and a new way to use and take advantage of the internet. (Hoyos & Sastoque 2020, p.40).

Recognizing this concept brings with it several challenges: training, process implementation, selecting tools that align with business capabilities, and so on. The companies of the future will be those that effectively integrate technology with human talent; however, this task requires commitment and a well-structured plan. In fact, nearly 70% of digital transformation initiatives fail to achieve the desired results due to difficulties in adapting, both for employees and the organization itself, to the demands of the digital age. This suggests that the approach to success in digital transformation should focus on people rather than technologies. Therefore, having the right talent to face the challenges that organizations have ahead is fundamental. In this regard, companies must concentrate their efforts on adjusting their organizational structures, work methods, and talent management policies (Vilaplana & Stein, 2020).

To paraphrase Sierra's statement from 2022, both the implementation of strategies and training in the use of these tools to advance said strategies should be a priority in companies.

Given the aforementioned challenges, it can be interpreted that training becomes a key element for SMEs to more effectively leverage the opportunities offered by the digital environment. Training in digital tools is fundamental to ensuring that employees are equipped with the necessary skills to implement effective strategies that keep the company competitive. Huacon and Encalada affirm that "training is one of the most important aspects for organizations" (2021, p. 25).

Castro and Del Rosario (2020) highlight that key tools for SMEs include social media management, SEO (search engine optimization), SEM (search engine marketing), and retargeting . SEO improves a website's visibility in organic search results, which is crucial for attracting relevant traffic without relying

solely on paid advertising. SEM, which includes paid search engine ads, can be an effective way to generate leads quickly and effectively.

Retargeting , another important strategy, allows companies to re-engage users who have shown interest in their products or services but have not yet made a purchase. This maximizes conversion opportunities by reminding consumers of their previous interest and offering them incentives to return. (Rivera & Cuenca, 2024) .

Furthermore, according to Holguín et al. (2022), all companies, regardless of size, should be open to exploring other digital tools, such as social media marketing, email marketing, and data analytics, which are essential for understanding consumer behavior and adapting marketing strategies accordingly. Continuous training in these areas not only improves a company's competitiveness but also allows it to innovate and adapt to changing market demands (Mera et al., 2022).

### **3. Methodology**

This text is reflective in nature, and therefore its initial approach is qualitative. Its scope is also considered exploratory, as it draws on concepts from reliable bibliographic sources and engages in dialogue and interpretation around them in order to fulfill the stated objectives. According to Sampieri and Mendoza, this approach is viable because it also addresses the existing literature on a given topic at a specific time. This design is considered relevant because reflection generates strategic proposals that determine the direction of companies. Pérez et al. (2020) refer to this, mentioning that substantial transformations arise from these exercises.

Specifically, a search has been carried out in indexed databases such as Google Scholar and Web of Science. Science , filtering from 2020 to guarantee results that take up current contexts with the key premise of: digital marketing trends, Digital Marketing, as a holistic word and digitization challenges in companies., of these there are more than 6,000 texts.

Exclusion criteria included irrelevant topics or texts outside the time frame. An opportunity is also recognized for a comprehensive expansion to accompany this reflection with a broad bibliographic review, for a selection based on convenience.

### **4. Results**

Leveraging the theoretical framework and providing traceability to the methodological approach, it is obtained that:

Marketing in the digital age has moved beyond simply creating a new distribution and sales channel. It has solidified the fact that, in addition to physical points of sale, purchases mediated by ICTs have become increasingly prevalent. This shift has opened up a vast field for effectively systematizing this dynamic, striving to create more user-friendly and accessible spaces for consumers, as well as analyzing

their most frequent habits. This has given rise to terms like SEO (SE), Retargeting , and Metrics, among others. While these developments reflect current trends, considering the state of the art and the challenges ahead, it is essential to mention the arrival and applicability of Artificial Intelligence (AI). In other words, the most current trend and challenge to date is dedicated to the applicability of AI to marketing processes, which are vast and related to all areas of companies. Thanks to Artificial Intelligence, companies can now understand their customers more deeply, offer personalized experiences and optimize their marketing strategies, which has radically transformed the sector (Ching, 2024) .

Regarding the challenges, there are two main areas: one dedicated to the adoption and use of digital tools. This is considered a challenge because the number of digital tools available for effective marketing is vast, and selecting them requires investments in both money and time, as well as adapting them to the specific characteristics of each company. The second challenge relates to the maintenance of these tools and the adoption of new ones. The central issue here is the necessary training for staff. However, to emphasize this point: training in topics that evolve daily in an accelerated environment presents a challenge for companies' human talent. Training times can mean that by the time they receive the training, more updated versions or different tools already exist. Therefore, "organizations must keep up with rapidly changing trends" (Marrugo, 2022, p. 78), keeping pace with technological advancements.

Having mentioned the above, some strategic approaches for companies can be related, initially, to the appropriate selection of tools that will be part of the digital channel and the digital marketing tactics and objectives for the organization. This selection should be made clearly seeking maximum benefit with minimum investment in order to make proper use of resources. Similarly, it is important to be aware of the demands and responsibilities of the human talent dedicated to this area. While execution is required, training and specific instructions on how to use the selected tools, specific to the company, should also be part of the company's responsibility. An example could be specialization in the use of existing tools before adopting new ones and the allocation of time for employees to reinforce and acquire skills. Rosales & Llanos indicate that training is fundamental for business success, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which represent 50% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and play a key role in the global economy. Investment in training increases efficiency, productivity and competitiveness, and is crucial to facing the challenges of globalization and technological advancement (2021).

An example of this is the study by Orozco Escobar et al. (2022), which offers a practical context for how implementing digital marketing strategies can improve competitiveness and increase sales in a small and medium-sized enterprise, such as the B&Z hardware store. The authors demonstrate how using digital tools can increase the company's visibility and appeal, directly contributing to this research. The study also highlights the importance of applying well-defined advertising and promotional strategies to achieve market competitiveness. This is accomplished through the implementation of digital strategies that enable the company to meet its objectives. This work is relevant because it also emphasizes the cross-cutting nature of digitalization, prompting reflection on how the digital market and its goal of increasing sales require efforts across different variables. From an epistemological perspective, the four Ps of digital marketing can be revisited: product, price, place, and promotion.

## 5. Discussions

As such, results and conclusions are presented that allow for a comprehensive approach to the topic, given the abundance of literature and case studies. The evolution of marketing in the digital age has notably minimized logistical efforts in the dynamics of exchange between suppliers and consumers, as well as in the creation of job opportunities. Martínez et al. mention that "the adoption of digital mechanisms allows companies to improve their performance" (2021, p. 85). This suggests that the main trend is the implementation of digital marketing. However, in line with this evolution, it is important to mention that the identified pattern refers to the challenge in terms of capabilities and skills acquisition, since the pace of change is very short compared to the time required for human talent development. This results in a high demand for academic and professional profiles (Hernandez 2024).

As a practical implication, taking into account a clear stance with what has been said up to this point: marketing within companies requires daily efforts; it is not enough to have a good product or service, but rather efforts are required in different areas that seek an increase in sales and business positioning.

## 6. Conclusions

By implementing the established objectives and analyzing the results, it's possible to understand how digitalization has transformed marketing strategies. These strategies address all the variables of traditional marketing and strive for a broader reach at a lower cost through the implementation of ICTs. This includes defining digital sales channels, creating digital catalogs, providing customer service with virtual assistants, and implementing social media strategies, among others. This is evident in the creation of new markets, the personalization of customer experiences, and the optimization of business processes. Digitalization, as a general principle applied to marketing, gives rise to digital marketing. The findings of this study suggest that companies adopting digital marketing strategies will be better equipped to face the challenges of the current and future market.

Interpreting this, it can be concluded that the evolution of marketing in the digital age generates an opportunity for business expansion; however, it is also necessary to understand that challenges are present, in this case related to the adoption of suitable tools and the constant training of personnel.

The main trends in digital marketing refer to the creation of digital ecosystems with a starting point built from companies' own websites, social networks and search engines, thus achieving a positive presence and impact in the relationship between companies and consumers, since the aforementioned trends seek a more fluid communication in accordance with the tastes of consumers, specifically the analysis of retargeting and the implementation of SEO and SEM strategies.

When reflecting on the challenges that companies face when adopting digital marketing strategies, the importance of having possible solutions or strategic adaptations is also highlighted, including the appropriate selection of tools and training, but no less important is attending to the business capabilities and the logistics required to decide to venture into developments related to digital marketing.

This concludes with the intention of highlighting the relevance of the existence and evolution of digital marketing, while also acknowledging the limitations of each context. For example, a strategy focused on numerical expansion through social media is not the same as disseminating a green marketing strategy . This text contributes to the discussion on digital marketing, emphasizing the importance of training and selecting appropriate tools for business success. To delve deeper into this topic, future research could explore the effectiveness of different digital marketing training models, the impact of artificial intelligence on business decision-making, and the creation of ethical frameworks for the responsible use of emerging technologies in marketing.

In closing, applied research is suggested to analyze cases and make comparisons. Furthermore, it is currently necessary to discuss, reflect on, and analyze scenarios that implement artificial intelligence. This topic is transversal to society; just as digitalization refers to the use of technological tools and these have impacted all aspects of societal dynamics, the same is true for artificial intelligence, which is present in everyday devices and will therefore generate new forms of interaction, work, and so on.

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