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**Digital marketing as an effective tool for advertising in
India: A critical review**

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ABSTRACT

Digital marketing is a very promising advertising tool in the developed nations where internet penetration is almost as deep as up to 80% of the population size. However, in developing economies and especially in case of India, the use of digital marketing as an effective tool for advertising needs to be examined in detail. The dynamics of the Indian market are quite different and challenging at the same time, due to a fairly low internet penetration as compared to the total population size, in addition to parameters like poverty and illiteracy which have a major impact on how businesses implement their marketing spends effectively to drive business growth. The literature review takes into account the current advertising practices in India, the reasons for their success and popularity. The current media consumption of the Indian population, and their readiness to embrace digital marketing as a preferred source over traditional medium. The data gathered reveals very interesting but critical facts about Indian consumers.

While internet penetration and digital media use and consumption is definitely on a steady rise, the Indian consumer is still very traditional in the way they consume media and make their buying decisions. The touch and feel phenomenon is still a very important part of the whole shopping experience and a crucial factor for making a purchase. The cash on delivery model has definitely made shopping from the digital marketplace and e-tailers fairly popular, however, a large part of the Indian population is yet not very savvy or confident about using digital payments and cash transactions still remain the preferred choice of payments amongst most including a large part of the educated class in the higher age bracket. This paper uses secondary data from books, research papers, reliable websites, and marketing journals to establish facts and draw conclusions.

The conclusions of this study reveal that while digital marketing is definitely a very promising tool for effective marketing and advertising, and its popularity is gaining momentum, its applicability in

the Indian market given the peculiar characteristics and traditional mindset of the Indian consumers, is still not at its complete potential. The Indian market will need a significant amount of time to embrace digital media and make it their preferred choice for reaching consumers for brand promotion and business growth. For any business to strive for growth and increase in revenue through sales, successful marketing, and advertising would have to rely on a well-thought marketing and media mix that involves the use of both the traditional and digital media based on the type of business, industry, and target consumer base.

Introduction

Advertising is omnipresent, it helps businesses earn profits by enabling them to reach out to as many more people, informing them about the products and services that a company offers. Advertising intends to continually attract attention and convert it into a desire to stimulate action that leads to a purchase. Irrespective of the type of goods and services a company provides, it cannot rely on a one-time announcement or word-of-mouth chatter to keep customers coming back to them repeatedly. Therefore advertising is essential to drive continuous business growth.

Advertising is a costly affair for any organization and hence it is important to ensure that a marketing or advertising effort translates into the achievement of the intention behind it, be it brand promotion, creating awareness, or sale of a product or service. The value of advertising depends on the effect it has on purchase. (Taskiran & Yilmaz, 2015)

For centuries, people and companies have been using traditional methods of advertising. These include traditional media like television, magazines, newspapers, billboards, cinema halls, door-to-door selling, and leaving flyers.

Digital marketing uses digital channels to promote services or products and to reach customers. Digital marketing includes marketing using the internet and other channels such as mobile phones (both SMS and MMS) that may not use the internet, social media marketing, display advertising, search engine marketing, and several other forms of digital media. Digital media enables consumers to access information, irrespective of place and time. Digital marketing deploys product and brand marketing tactics, an extensive selection of services that primarily use the Internet as a principal promotional medium, in addition to mobile and traditional radio and TV.

Digital media allows consumers to make better-informed decisions as they have access to customer reviews, expert views, and media and peer reviews that ascertain brand and company claims.

Today as the reach of the internet is almost universal, Digital marketing has become one of the most important or rather the most important tool for advertising, employed widely by organizations across the globe for advertising their brands and products. Digital marketing is an important part of nearly every crucial business decision ranging from pricing, product development, and recruitment to public relations. Kingsnorth, S. (2019).

The objective of this paper is to

- Differentiate between digital and traditional marketing
- To understand digital marketing technology and the advantages of using it
- To understand the rise of digital marketing in India

- Discuss the applicability of digital marketing in developing economies taking India as a case in point.
- To analyze whether Digital Marketing is Key enabler or a medium with limitations for brands
- To offer findings, suggestions, and conclusions.

Literature review:

“Digital marketing is a form of direct marketing that links consumers with sellers electronically utilizing interactive technologies like websites, emails, newsgroups and online forums, interactive television, mobile communications etcetera” (Armstrong, 2009).

Way back in 1998, executives at McKinsey and company had discussed and emphasized on the rise of new interactive media as an outcome of the rapid growth of the World Wide Web and online services. They referred to this new interactive media as Digital marketing and appraised marketers on the opportunities and threats that this new interactive media has to offer and developed an integrated perspective on leveraging new interactive media for marketing. (*Organizing Today for the Digital Marketing of Tomorrow - Parsons - 1998 - Journal of Interactive Marketing - Wiley Online Library*, n.d.)

Digital marketing has been defined as “Achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies and media” (Hemphill, 2019). Henneberry, R., Deiss, R. (2020) state that “A data-driven business goes beyond making marketing decision based on instincts, otherwise your actions are like tossing spaghetti on the wall and observing what sticks- they will be as efficient”. Dodson, I. (2016) states that “successful digital campaigns share a range of characteristics, but campaigns that fail, they all have one thing in common: they don’t acknowledge the empowered and informed consumer”. (Ohmae)emphasizes the importance of a clear and measurable e-marketing strategy for reaping the benefits of this technology, he states that there is no point paddling harder if you are paddling in the wrong direction.

On the same lines McGruer, D. (2020) says a critical digital marketing fact to remember is, matching demand with content. A brand’s knowledge of its customer and the problem they wish to solve, help them in creating content which is based on demand and will surely create engagement. Marketers should never lose sight of the end game that is conversion, effective digital marketing is about making use of digital channels to effectively reach your target audience and generate leads that convert. However conversion could have different forms for different businesses, it might mean profitable clients, sharing content to educate, or creating awareness. Regardless of what a business does, the purpose of using digital marketing should always be done to meet the objective, and meeting the objective is successful conversion.

According to Smith, P., Chaffey, D. (2012) “e-marketing can identify, anticipate and satisfy customer needs efficiently, however sloppy e-marketing in the form of broken sites, delayed deliveries, non-responses, and impersonal responses can cause more damage than good, as a customer today is empowered and word of mouth spreads like wildfire. Social media leads to conversion of consumers into advertisers and marketers and consumers can generate negative pressure for the company, its

services, and products, based on how the business is portrayed online and also depending on the superiority of product or services presented to the customer (Kraynak, 2008). Reinstating the above fact is the definition by (Siegel, 2000)“e-marketing is not about building a website, but building a web business, harmonizing the power of customers”.

Therefore while Chaffey points towards the definitive role of digital marketing as a driver of business success, digital technology should be used to accelerate the growth of business in line with the business model and strategy and not the other way round. As per Chaffey, D., Smith, P. (2017), brand strategy defines the objectives and summarises how can the objectives be achieved while guiding all successive comprehensive tactical decisions. The brand strategy should give rise to the digital marketing strategy in the form of a channel strategy whereby digital media and electronic channels support other communication and distribution channels. As per (Gurau, 2008) while the online marketing atmosphere raises a sequence of opportunities, it also gives rise to challenges for marketing experts.

Differences between Digital and traditional marketing:

Traditional marketing has been used widely in the past and even today it remains a critical element of any organization's marketing plan. Some of the popular forms of traditional advertising are

- Business cards, Flyers, pamphlets, business cards, and brochures.
- Articles based on interviews with students, journalists, and others
- Community and other events, for instance, tasting events, cooking demonstrations.
- Business press releases
- Business listings in the trade magazine
- Advertisements in magazines, newspapers, and radio broadcasts
- Merchandise such as t-shirts, pens, bags, key chains.
- Promotions with Celebrity associations.

All these methods of advertising and promotion rely on a non-digital way of promoting a product or a service.

On the other hand, digital marketing employs the use of any digital medium online and offline to put across the marketing message. According to “CAM Foundation” – “Digital Marketing is a wide-ranging discipline, that brings together all methods of marketing that operate via electronic devices – on mobile, online, on-screen”.

Digital advertising is a data-driven, targeted, advertising strategy used to reach consumers in each stage of their buying decision, from awareness to purchase and moving them ahead from one stage to the other of the buying funnel. Digital media advertising can be used to drive revenue, employing digital media advertising and online advertising channels such as Google to drive revenue.

The forms of digital advertising that are most prevalent are:

- Search engines: advertising on search engines like Google, Bing, Yahoo
- Display advertising of video advertisements across affiliate websites that can include YouTube
- Social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest allow the use of text, image, or video ads.

- Collaborating with influencers.

The major differences between digital and traditional marketing have been summarised below:

Digital Marketing	Traditional Marketing
Digital marketing includes email marketing online advertising, text messaging, social media, affiliate marketing, pay-per-click, search engine optimization.	Traditional marketing includes direct mail, print, broadcast, and telephone
Continuous Engagement with the consumers	Minimal interaction with the consumers
Duration of advertising is short, ads change daily weekly, or monthly	Advertising campaigns are planned for longer periods a quarter, 6 months to a year
Cost-effective, easier and faster	Costly and time-consuming
Extensive reach through digital media	Limited reach
Flexibility for round the clock engagement and response	No flexibility in terms of exposure, engagement, and response.
Targeted and easy to measure	Difficult to measure and target effectively

Benefits of digital marketing technology

According to WebFx, Currently, businesses worldwide spend close to \$250 billion or more on digital advertising each year. This amount is only increasing every day due to the remarkable “return on investment” generated by digital ads. For businesses that wish to remain competitive, it has become almost mandatory to go online with the ad strategy. It’s important to understand what makes digital marketing a go-to strategy and how to benefit from it.

Below reasons make digital marketing an absolute must for any business to get to the top

- **Digital marketing is cost-effective:**

Traditional marketing campaigns through television or print, are expensive because of costly resources and it is difficult to track their return on investment. Digital marketing employs targeted analytics and research to establish which methods are generating results and which one is not worthy of the cost or resources. Hence digital channels of marketing are less expensive from the beginning and avoid overspending on nonperforming campaigns.

- **Start-up’s and small businesses can also leverage digital marketing:**

Digital marketing almost closes the gap between small, medium, and large businesses as it offers each business irrespective of its size, many similar resources. While large companies have larger budgets to spend on advanced software and paid ads, digital marketing provides more opportunities to the SMBs to compete effectively, by building awareness about the brand, and an audience that can become future customers.

- **ROI measures program results and determines effectiveness:**

Using traditional marketing, measuring the ROI of a print ad becomes difficult as compared to using a digital ad, since the audience that a print ad addresses are much wider. As with digital marketing, one can target precise audiences, it gets easier to

establish which advertisement has generated which sale. Other approaches to measure ROI are attributing multiple people and programs, market mix modeling, and test and control groups.

- **Sales data is validated by online market share:**

Online market share represents the percentage of the total market sales of a business and is fairly easy to determine. Market share provides sales figures information and allows the business to view its sales with respect to market size. Businesses can precisely observe where they stand up to the competition, which can improve their business decisions.

- **Application of A/B testing improves communication with the customer.**

One of the best features provided by digital marketing is that it enables a business to experiment with nearly every facet of marketing campaigns. A/B testing a subject line, the color of a promotional banner, etc., is way faster and easier on digital channels. With careful thinking, minor changes can be incorporated and used for targeting customers more efficiently. The outcomes of A/B testing can be applied for improving targeting through print ads too.

- **Mobile marketing can reach the remotest of customers:**

With the smartphone revolution, a large group of people does not deem owning a TV or a laptop or desktop even necessary today. In such cases, mobile marketing unlocks a whole new set of opportunities to increase engagement, by creating personalized user experiences to reach new users. Mobile marketing allows businesses to reach users in their most innate atmosphere using various digital tools such as email, social ad design, SEO, or branded apps.

- **The power of Digital analytics and big data:**

Measuring data from digital analytics can help businesses make informed choices about investing their resources and improving effectiveness. Data gathering for traditional channels of marketing is a manual process, whereas on the other hand most digital platforms, including marketing automation and social media, use dashboards with built-in analytics making relevant data available automatically. Mapping the customer journey to viewing statistics on dashboards for easy visuals to mapping the customer journey to measuring performance metrics at every step becomes a very stress-free job.

- **Digital can deliver personalized attention and richer engagement:**

Digital marketing eradicates the “One size fits all” tactic of marketing by providing businesses improved insight into segmentation. Utilizing outcomes from tracking customer behavior to personalize reach helps in creating the ideal customer experience. An enriching customer experience translates to improved loyalty and trustworthiness, more customer conversions, and an increasing squad of brand advocates.

- **Marketing automation allows for concentrating effort on more important issues:**

Marketing automation lets managers and marketers focus on generating effective strategies and gaging meaningful analytics. These systems allow sales and marketing teams to focus on their expertise, and therefore optimizing strategies, without having to waste resources on irrelevant smaller ones that are time-consuming.

- **Businesses can leverage social media for building trust and enhancing brand value:**

Digital advertising utilizes social media to make reviews, likes, and other positive mentions about the brand or product to friends of customers. Recommendations, positive reviews, spread positive word of mouth and provide the business a competitive advantage and help to build trust and credibility.

- **Place your brand where the customers can find it using SEO:**

Google has become synonymous with search, everyone uses it today. Most of the product or B2B purchase cycle starts with a web search and therefore the best ROI is provided by search engine optimization (SEO) out of any other tools of digital marketing. For any business to be considered by the customer, it must show up on the first page of Google search. A robust SEO strategy can advance a business’s Google ranking and the likely hood of acquiring the business as well.

The reasons that make digital marketing a far more superior medium for effective advertising lie in its cost-effectiveness, its measurability, its ability to grab a higher reach and obtain better conversion rates. Digital marketing as technology has something to offer to everyone, from small businesses to large enterprises, commercial, government, or NGO anyone can benefit from the use and proper implementation of digital marketing.

However, how to use this technology to reap maximum benefits is where the skill of the marketers becomes absolutely critical. Not every business is the same, not every product is the same hence not the same marketing strategy can be applied across, and therefore opting for the right tool and appropriate channel of digital marketing is what can benefit, else its effort down the drain.

The rise of digital marketing in India:

As internet penetration is on a study rise across the country, the digital marketing industry has also been growing very rapidly.

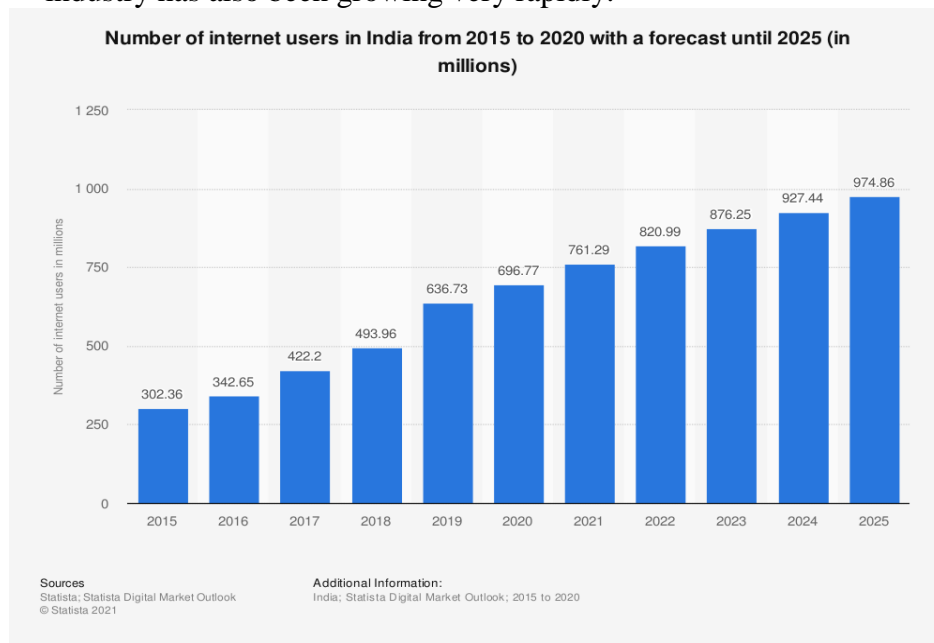


Fig-1 number of internet users in India from 2015 to 2020 with a forecast till 2025

As per “(Digital in India: All the Statistics You Need in 2021 — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights, n.d.)” India’s population was estimated to be 1.39 billion in January 2021, out of which 35.2% of the Indian population resides in urban centers and 64.8% resides in rural areas. There were close to 624 million internet users in India in January 2021 and internet penetration in India stood at 45%.

In January 2021, there were 448.0 million social media users in India. The number of social media users in India increased by 78 million close to 21% between 2020 and 2021 making the number of internet users equivalent to 32.3% of the total population in January 2021.

Market size of the digital advertising industry across India from financial year 2011 to 2020, with estimates until 2024
(in billion Indian rupees)

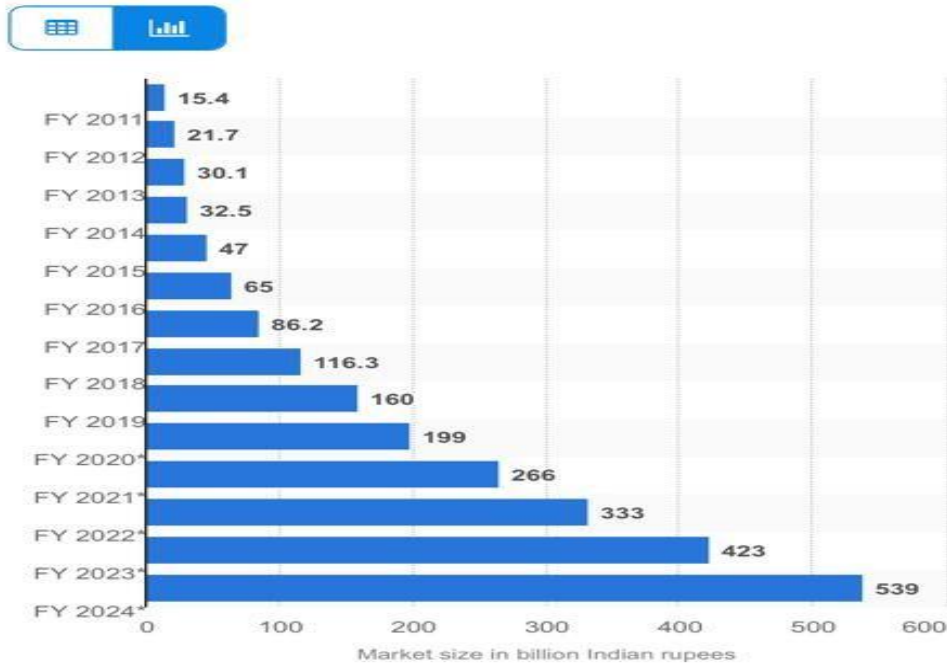


Fig-2 market size of digital marketing industry across India 2011 to 2020 with estimates till 2024

The digital marketing industry is on a rapid growth trajectory across the world. The digital advertising industry in the financial year 2020 had a market size of around 199 billion Indian rupees up from just 47 billion Indian rupees in the financial year 2015. This has been projected to grow to around 539 billion rupees by the financial year 2024, signifying a big growth in the business segment. However, if we go by the statistics of current media spends in India, traditional media still remains the preferred choice, while digital is certainly catching up rapidly.

Digital Marketing in India:

While digital marketing is a very powerful and efficient tool for marketing and advertising its success deeply depends on the characteristics and target markets of the customer base where it is used. Digital marketing technology heavily relies on the use of the internet and digital media. Besides to be effective, it requires a basic level of education and tech-savviness.

According to (*Digital in India: All the Statistics You Need in 2021 — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights*, n.d.)

- India had a population of 1.39 billion in January 2021.
- 35.2% of the Indian population lives in urban centers and 64.8% lives in rural areas
- There were close to 624 million internet users in India in January 2021 and internet penetration in India stood at 45%
- There were 448.0 million social media users in India in January 2021
- The number of social media users increased by 78 million close to 21% between 2020 and 2021 making the number of internet users equivalent to 32.3% of the total population in January 2021 in India.

According to Statista, television formed the highest share of daily media consumption amongst the Indian population in 2020. In comparison to other media, over 3 hours were spent watching TV, whereas the usage of laptop/mobile/or desktop ranked second at over 1.5 hours every day in the same period of time. Typically, five hours were spent on media usage in 2020 - digital or otherwise on a daily basis in India. (• *India - Daily Media Consumption by Type 2020 | Statista*, n.d.)

In the financial year 2020, the total advertising revenue of India was above 700 billion Indian rupees from which the revenue generated by digital advertising across India was valued at around 199 billion Indian rupees. (• *India - Digital Ad Revenue 2008-2022 | Statista*, n.d.) Furthermore, the highest portion of ad revenue was generated from the Indian TV advertisement market, evaluated to be over INR 250 billion in the financial year 2018, followed by the print market.

Forecasts for each of these sections show that the digital ad market will quickly overtake television and print revenues put together by the fiscal year 2024. According to these forecasts, the digital ad revenue in the country is estimated to reach 540 billion rupees by the fiscal year 2024, while the print and television ad revenues are projected to reach about INR 276 billion and 445 billion respectively. These numbers clearly demonstrate that India is moving towards a digital advertising future. Current market trends certainly indicate that digital advertising appears ready to take over traditional advertising concerning the market share in the coming years even then traditional mediums are the go-to mediums today and will continue to be in the near future as well.

According to a report by the national payments corporation of India (*Digital Payments Adoption in India, 2020*, n.d.) Digital payment adoption is growing rapidly in India. Overall, one-third of Indian houses are using digital payments in some of the other forms. Heartening to note that almost one-fourth of the households in the bottom 40% income group is using it as well and it has not remained a rich or well-educated person's preserve. 15% of houses in the bottom and middle category would like to adopt digital payments.

While these figures definitely highlight the evolution of the Indian population and their rising use and awareness of the internet and social media, it is also important to look at how this same population behaves as a consumer and what is the purchasing behavior exhibited by them.

India cannot be regarded just as a country, but a subcontinent equivalent to the size of Europe With a population of more than 1.3 billion, close to 22 official languages,

29 states, and a long and rich cultural heritage that continues to color the society today, understanding culture and business styles in a country like India is definitely not easy. Vast geographies, cross-cultural differences, and linguistic variations make India a very challenging market for any business.

Digital Marketing – Key enabler or a medium with limitations for brands?

There is a lot of discussion around how digital is the future of marketing, but at the same time, a lot of factors are being brushed under the carpet when it comes to what actually makes brands successful and businesses grow.

The underlying fact is that digital and traditional methods of advertising are a means to an end, where the end is the implementation of the brand strategy. To be successful a business should have a clear understanding of its brand strategy and the consumer it intends to target. This understanding is then communicated in the form of a message which is the advertisement, through a medium of choice which provides the best possible reach, to the target customer base in the most effective way. This medium can either be digital or traditional, the choice of the medium should be based on the ability of the medium to reach and target the consumer segment that the brand wishes to communicate to and not on the assumed effectiveness of the medium itself.

India is a very heterogeneous market when the customer demographics are taken into account. The age, gender, income levels, education levels, purchasing power, and spending abilities are very different. To cater to a population of this kind, a one plan fits all strategy can never be successful.

A case in point can be an FMCG company selling a mass-market product, the marketers might opt for a higher media spend on television ads to reach its mass target customer base, but might also adopt a digital media plan to reach target customers residing in media dark villages or towns where due to irregular power supplies TV is not accessible, but active mobile internet consumption offers a scope to reach such customers effectively through digital media.

Leading FMCG brands like Surf excel, Britannia, Nestle, Lux, Lifebuoy to name a few have an optimal mix of investments behind both traditional & digital mediums. While they maximize reach through above-the-line mediums like TV, Print, Outdoor, etc, incremental reach and frequency maximization is done by leveraging the power of digital which subsumes search, static, video & mobile platforms. Over some time leading FMCG brands have also expanded their portfolio into newer need segments catering to niche segments. Now, for every innovation, a brand may not have an appetite to invest in TV & therefore the role of digital becomes even more important for sharp targeting and engagement. One big advantage that digital platforms give over traditional mediums for these brands is that they can engage on scale through digital, thus making the target audience not only their consumers but advocates as well, which is quite restrictive for a one-way medium like TV or print.

On the other hand, a high-end luxury automobile manufacturer may spend negligible amounts on traditional media, and focus predominantly on digital media to reach the super-rich or upper-class social group who in all possibilities are, tech-savvy, educated active social media users and easier to reach and engage with on digital media platforms.

Therefore, a complete understanding of one's own brand strategy, the message that the brand wishes to communicate through the advertisement, and consumer behavior should be the basis of opting for a digital or traditional method of advertising and not because the world is running in one direction and you follow without a reason. The ability to narrow down who my target customer is as, precisely as possible, makes the choice of media a fairly easy one.

Digital Marketing – Building the right balance between effectiveness & efficiency

While brand strategy & key tasks remain at the core, the critical question that every marketer faces is how to create the balance between mediums for an effective & efficient plan. The same digital platforms have rapidly emerged to provide the right balance which could include the following combinations,

- a. Maximizing reach amongst a sharp target group
- b. Incremental reach over & above mainstream mediums efficiently (optimized cost per reach)
- c. Maximizing frequency over base reach (which may be important for high involvement products or offerings that require detailed understanding)
- d. Maximizing reach & frequency amongst target groups or geographical clusters where mainstreams mediums are not present (media dark markets etc) through mobile
- e. Always rely on content strategy to drive continuous salience at an optimal cost

Businesses have become cognizant of the power of digital marketing and now have more active engagement with digital platform leaders like Google (including YouTube), Facebook and influencers. Leading platform leaders are not only working in tandem to deliver balanced media plans but are also creating unique content since they understand their user base & profile better vs brands simply banking on their traditional creative agencies to develop digital out content/media assets.

This again is a big shift because digital is not only about delivering an efficient plan, but the real effectiveness comes through content/assets which resonates with the digital audience that does a much better job of not only delivering the intended message but also triggering positive engagement.

Conclusion:

Always put a lot of thought into your marketing campaigns, every business wants to succeed and be profitable. Digital advertising allows for better business growth. Brands can become famous and gain popularity almost overnight today, however, this is where the catch is, while digital can propel your growth and popularity it can backfire with double the magnitude. People today have zero tolerance for illogical or senseless content and are extremely vocal about it as well. No one is spared, and the time that big brands could dictate terms is long gone.

In the wake of trying to be unique, creative, and out of the box, businesses should not lose sight of the fundamentals of marketing, which is who are they advertising to. If marketing campaigns lack the purpose of uplifting and promoting the brand drawing in customers, then no matter which mode of communication they choose their efforts are bound to fail.

Digital platforms provide businesses with a vast playground where they can experiment and reach out to millions of people but this should be done with a great marketing strategy as a starting point.

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