

Examining the challenges of digital marketing in the furniture industry

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges of digital marketing in the Iraqi furniture industry. The present study is a descriptive and survey study in terms of its applied purpose and data collection method. The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire that was distributed to 386 people in the furniture industry to meaningfully examine the factors, challenges, and strategies of digital marketing management. After

collecting the data, the Studio T-test was used to examine the significance of the items, and the results showed that all the extracted items were significant.

Keywords: Marketing Management, Marketing Management Strategyn Digital Marketing.

* Introduction

Customer satisfaction is one of the key factors that competitive companies are seeking in today's business world. Satisfied and loyal customers provide stable income to

the company. Nowadays, the growing importance of services for the growth and prosperity of most world economies is evident. Serious attention to service management and marketing can lead to a new transformation and effect in insurance organizations. One of the main problems of modern marketing is the ineffectiveness of old advertising methods. Therefore, new marketers are struggling to find new ways to introduce products and services in the market. Regarding the increasing use of digital tools by consumers and customers and the new generation, it seems that a huge transformation in traditional marketing is necessary, which is conducted through digital marketing. Its tools, strategies and solutions fit the new era. In line with the fourth industrial revolution, and for survival and permanence, organizations must take the digital marketing approach seriously in formulating their marketing strategies to affect the consumer who is a mobile generation and introduce him the products and services to meet his needs (Aagaard et al., 2019).

In today's digital age, having a strong digital marketing strategy is critical to the success of any company, resembling a road map that guides businesses in the online world

(Franco-Ángel et al., 2019).

First, a digital marketing strategy helps business owners reach their target audience. With so many people online, you need a plan to connect with the right customers. This strategy ensures that your efforts are focused where it matters most (Nofal et al., 2020).

Second, it enhances brand awareness. Through social media, content marketing and other online tactics, people can make their brand visible to a larger audience. This cognition can lead to more trust and credibility. Third, a well-thought-out strategy saves time and money. Without a plan, resources may be spent in ineffective ways, however, with a strategy, it is invested in channels that bring real results (Nofal et al., 2020).

Moreover, a digital marketing strategy allows businesses to analyze their efforts. You can track what works and what does not. Such data help you make informed decisions and adjust your tactics accordingly. Also, digital marketing strategies open doors for direct interaction with customers. Social media and email marketing allow business owners to connect with their audience, answer their questions, and build a loyal customer base (Fejling et al., 2019).

A solid strategy adapts to

change. Online trends evolve quickly and a good app is flexible enough to keep up. This agility ensures that a business remains agile in the fast-paced digital landscape. Consequently, a digital marketing strategy is crucial for any company that plans to thrive in the modern age. It's the road map that guides people to their target audience, increases brand awareness, saves resources, delivers insights, enhances customer engagement, adapts to change, and keeps ahead of competitors. With a well-thought-out strategy, one's business can successfully navigate the digital arena and achieve its goals(Adamu et al.,2020).

So , the purpos of the current research is Examining the challenges of digital marketing in the furniture industry

*** Theoretical foundations**

The customer experience of a brand online is growing day by day. It is estimated that e-commerce will account for more than 14% of global retail sales in 2019 and 22% of global sales by 2023 (eMarketer, 2019). The coronavirus may accelerate this growth, with 48% of consumers reporting in May 2020 that the virus has made them buy products online they would normally buy in-store (Numerator Intelligence, 2020).

Digital retail sales are quickly

becoming an essential sales channel for consumers and may no longer be just an alternative to shopping in traditional stores. At the same time, marketers reported that they allocated 50.1% of their budget to digital marketing channels in 2019, and predict that 60.5% of their marketing budget will be spent on digital marketing initiatives by the beginning of 2023 (eMarketer 2020). In the current digital environment, marketing analysis is essential. There is a great deal of marketing research investigating the practical aspects of the marketing analytics science, from basic definitions (Iacobucci et al., 2019) to specific applications (Mikalef et al., 2018) and adoption in a company (Vollrath and Villegas, 2022), however, relatively few materials were written in the field of integrating the science of analysis with marketing theory (Iacobucci et al., 2019).

Digital marketing involves using the internet, mobile devices, social media, search engines and other channels to reach customers. Some experts consider this field as a completely new activity that requires a new way to approach customers and new ways of understanding customer behavior compared to traditional marketing. This area targets a specific part of the customer base and is

interactive (Katz, 2017). In today's world, we're witnessing a wide expansion of this field to include search results ads and tweets (these tools include anything that combines marketing with customer feedback or two-way company-customer interaction). Digital marketing varies from Internet marketing. Internet marketing is a type of advertising that takes place exclusively on the Internet, while digital marketing can also be done through mobile devices, on a subway platform, in a video game, or through a smartphone application (Vollrath and Villegas, 2022).

This field is a part of marketing that uses online and Internet-based digital technologies such as desktop computers, mobile phones, and other digital media and platforms to promote products and services. The development of this type of marketing in the late nineties changed the way brands and businesses use technology for marketing. As digital platforms are increasingly integrated into our marketing plans and daily lives, and as people increasingly use digital devices instead of physically visiting stores, campaigns in this area have also gained high popularity through a combination application of search engine optimization, search engine marketing, content marketing,

influencer marketing, content automation, campaign marketing, data-driven marketing, e-commerce marketing, social media marketing, social media optimization, direct email marketing, display advertising, books Electronics and optical boards, and games. This area has expanded to non-internet channels that digital media such as television, mobile phones and callbacks provide. The expansion of non-internet channels differentiates this field from online advertising (Vollrath and Villegas, 2022).

*** Digital marketing strategies**

A little time has passed since the arrival of the Internet in the commercial sphere and the beginning of the web world. However, during this period, there have been tremendous changes in businesses. Changes in digital technologies reduce information asymmetry between customers and businesses active in the field of e-commerce. The most important indicator of information asymmetry reduction can be seen in customer behavior. It is obvious that customer behavior is changing as a result of access to technology and various tools in mobile and online platforms, and this factor affects the acquisition of quality and price information, the search process, and customer

expectations. In addition, the emergence of digital platforms - entities created through innovation - which facilitate customer-to-customer interactions for thinking in the development of new services or products, reduces the information asymmetry of businesses (Beino and Alexanderson, 2020). The information asymmetry leads to the emergence of the ineffectiveness of the traditional theory for active businesses in the world of digital businesses. This characteristic has caused the theories and techniques used to analyze strategic components in traditional markets, including environmental analysis, competitor analysis, and customer analysis, as well as the analysis of resources and capabilities of the organization, to lose their effectiveness (Eisen, 2020). Therefore, developing new theories for the strategy content of companies active in e-commerce seems essential. The Internet and digitalization have led to changes in marketing paradigms, business categorization and even marketing mixes. The problem is, what changes have occurred in the content of the strategy presented by Hambrick and Fredrickson (2001) as the most basic issue for the above discussions?

According to Porter (2001), the Internet can change the structure of

the industry in a way that weakens overall profitability and has a destructive effect on business activities and reduces the ability of companies to create a sustainable operational advantage. However, the main issue is not whether to use Internet technology or not, but the issue of how to use the Internet in the growth of businesses and activities and advancement in the competitive market. Compared to previous generations of information technology, Internet technology provides better opportunities to create a distinctive strategic positioning for companies. Contrary to what many people think, the Internet has not only underestimated the importance of strategy but has also made it more necessary than ever (Febriyantor & Arisandi, 2019).

*** Factors affecting digital marketing strategy**

Continuous advances in technology are opening business owners new ways to digitally connect with their current and potential customers. Digital marketing covers a wide range of opportunities that businesses can explore, including email campaigns, banner ads, video marketing, blogging, mobile marketing, social media marketing, and television and radio (Ingram et al., 2019).

Various studies in the literature have developed models and methods to measure the effect of using digital marketing tools on SMEs and to understand consumer behavior during purchasing processes through these tools (Sarkar & Nath, 2020). For example, some models evaluate the adoption of digital tools by SMEs. As stated by Pradhan et al. (2020), factors leading to digital marketing adoption are related to top management persuasion, perceived benefits by organizations, and customer relationship management. The authors came to this conclusion after analyzing data from 200 small and medium enterprises in India using structural equation modeling with partial least squares (Jajang, 2022).

Digital marketing sale is also one of the most studied factors due to the widespread interest in understanding the effect of digital tools on a company's profitability. For instance, Somjai et al. (2020) concluded that digital marketing not only has a positive effect on profitability and sales, but also reduces overall marketing costs. Therefore it becomes a new and cheaper way to advertise because it increases consumer awareness faster than traditional marketing. Contrary to this, in a study conducted in India,

the authors found that one of the barriers to technology adoption is the cost of using digital tools in SMEs (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). In addition, Centobelli et al. (2016) claim that small and medium-sized enterprises have not allocated specific resources for technological evolution, which is why they lag behind digital trends.

When analyzing the SME business sector and the use of digital marketing, another important factor is the company's knowledge in this field. The use of online business methods and tools is a critical factor in their success in the e-commerce market. Using the right methods allows them to be seen more in search engines and thus achieve better results in marketing activities (Kovalenko & Kuzmenko, 2020). However, SMEs do not seem to be using the full potential of new digital tools, which is why they are not taking full advantage of the opportunities these tools offer. Regarding sales behavior through digital platforms, various studies presented quantitative methods and analyses using multiple linear regression to show the significant effect of digital marketing on marketing and consumer trust in the sales models of small and medium enterprises (Sulistiyo, 2019).

Other models used to understand digital marketing

adoption by SMEs include the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach. Both methods were used to explore the motivations and factors influencing the adoption of technological tools (Wolf & McQuitty, 2013). In this regard, the results of the study by Ritz et al. (2019) provide insight into the digital marketing behavior of small businesses, in that they support the idea that in addition to technological benefits, perceived ease of use may also affect small and medium business managers to be a stimulus to adopt digital marketing strategies.

Bermeo-Giraldo et al. (2022) presented the following factors as the most important factors affecting digital marketing strategies.

Acceptance as a means of communication - according to what was stated by AlSharji et al. (2018), the communication of small and medium-sized enterprises with customers and suppliers should be fast, timely, relevant and effective, especially when performing marketing activities. Due to the emergence of free communication tools provided by digital marketing through social media such as Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Messenger, communication has become global

and the audience has become a single community (Yasmin et al., 2015). Therefore, this factor aims to measure the acceptance of small and medium-sized enterprises from digital marketing as a means of communicating with consumers.

Benefits perceived by customers - This factor seeks to measure the benefits perceived by customers when interacting with companies through digital marketing. In addition, it presents a possibility for organizations to segment and reach more

target audiences (Piñeiro-Otero et al., 2016). Being able to live chat and discuss problems, complaints, doubts and other issues with a company's representative allows consumers to build trust and accept its quality services (Núñez, 2019).

Market positioning - In their study, Torres et al. (2017) found that 81% of SMEs in the commercial sector in Barranquilla, Colombia, use digital marketing to achieve a significant market position and thus become more competitive.

Business optimization- This factor refers to companies' understanding of resource optimization when using digital marketing. According to the results of Somalo (2017), digital marketing

requires less production resources, which is why investment costs are lower considering the economic benefits that Internet-based tools and platforms can provide (Kannan et al., 2017). In addition, the resources used to increase engagement on a company's website (click-through rate) and create brand awareness among customers pertain to business optimization, as they determine the return on investment made in advertising (Setiaboedi et al., 2018). Likewise, it measures the optimization factor in the time required for the commercialization process.

Perceived advantages of using digital tools- This refers to the perceived advantage of businesses over competitors when using digital tools provided by digital marketing. According to Gono et al.'s (2016) research, factors such as compatibility and relative advantage are considered to significantly affect the adoption of information and communication technology tools. Moreover, companies can reach a wider market share (Dobrescu et al., 2018) and globalize because potential consumers can be found all over the world (Bizhanova et al., 2019).

*** Digital marketing in the furniture industry**

The influence of technology in

human life is increasing day by day and covers all its aspects, so in the digital age, you cannot find an area that does not need digital marketing to offer its products and services. The furniture industry and interior decoration are no exception to this rule (Kostecka, 2023).

In general, industries that meet people's daily needs always have a favorable supply and demand market. For this reason, it is not surprising that the furniture and interior decoration industry is one of the most attractive and lucrative fields among different businesses. Before buying any product or service, most of the people search about it

in cyber space, compare different products and study its advantages and disadvantages. Using digital marketing in the interior decoration industry makes new customers get to know your business and see your products.

But some issues have made the activists of this field less involved in e-commerce and digital marketing, which are the reasons (Tsang et al., 2022).

- 1- The traditional nature of the competition
- 2- The desire of most buyers to view products and check before buying
- 3- Relatively high costs of buying these products

- 4- The choice is tasteful
- 5- Lack of recorded information in this area, both textual and visual

Digital marketing enables easier communication between producers and consumers by using the Internet platform, which is currently the most widely used communication network around the world. Digital marketing in the furniture industry, interior decoration and other related industries is a new method for branding, creating trust between customers, introducing products and services, and finally selling online(Naruoeei et al,2024).

*** Research methodology**

This research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in nature. This research is applied because the aim of applied research is to solve the problem and ultimately obtain information for decision-making and to meet urgent needs and problems. The activists in the Iraqi furniture industry were considered as the statistical population, which numbered 1500 people. Morgan's table was used to determine the sample size, which is equal to 386. In this research, library information such as books, related publications, research projects related to the subject and electronic information sources, especially reputable ISI and scientific-research

articles, as well as some academic sites and active and approved websites in the field of digital marketing, was used, and a researcher-made questionnaire was also used to measure the variables under study. To validate the model extracted from the quantitative phase, the Student's t-test was used to examine the significance of the model components.

*** Research findings**

In the following, the descriptive statistics of these people are presented first, and then the results of the structural equations are analyzed.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of people

Gender	Frequency	Education	cumulative frequency	Experience	Frequency
Female	77	B.A. and lower	0	Less than 5 years	0
Male	309	M.A.	85	Between 6 and 10 years	170
Total	386	PhD	301	Between 11 and 15 years	162
		Total	386	15 years and more	54
				Total	386

*** validity and reliability**

This research used Cronbach's alpha to calculate the internal agreement (reliability) of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Investigating the reliability of the entire questionnaire

Variable	No. of questions	Cronbach Alpha
Factors affecting digital marketing management and its strategies	80	0.933
Strategies to improve digital marketing management and its strategies	9	0.801
Challenges of digital marketing management and its strategies	6	0.743

As seen in the Table (2), the value of Cronbach's alpha for all three variables is greater than 0.7, therefore, the questionnaire question for each of the mentioned variables has reliability from the point of view of the value of this index and can be used to collect data and used to measure research variables.

* Student's t-test results

In this section, the significance of the extracted codes is analyzed using student's t- test. The results are presented in Tables (3), (4) and (5).

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Table3. Results related to factors affecting digital marketing management and its strategies in IKEA furniture company

Factors	Mean	DoF	T-statistic	significance	Results
Knowing the behavior of people in a field	2.9608	385	23.081	0.000	Significant
Explaining the stages of the customer's purchase journey	3.9020	385	39.693	0.000	Significant
Market segmentation and target customers	3.3627	385	26.786	0.000	Significant
Clarification of customer touchpoints	3.6373	385	33.868	0.000	Significant
Explanation of content and information	3.0761	385	36.022	0.000	Significant
Targeted advertising	3.7941	385	39.056	0.000	Significant

Factors	Mean	DoF	T-statistic	significance	Results
Product or service pricing	3.2353	385	29.228	0.000	Significant
providing service or product provision	3.7745	385	39.889	0.000	Significant
Explanation of SEO in search engines	3.5490	385	32.798	0.000	Significant
User interface	3.3039	385	29.953	0.000	Significant
Emphasis on customer feedback	3.8137	385	43.976	0.000	Significant
Media upgrade and update	3.6863	385	38.913	0.000	Significant
Platform	3.2451	385	28.791	0.000	Significant
System dynamics	3.9020	385	40.980	0.000	Significant
Macro environment	3.6667	385	38.552	0.000	Significant
Internal organizational factors	3.0588	385	24.799	0.000	Significant
newcomers	3.8235	385	43.698	0.000	Significant
Business credit from the customer's point of view	3.6275	385	37.483	0.000	Significant
The transience of the advantage of actions	4.0980	385	49.456	0.000	Significant

Factors	Mean	DoF	T-statistic	significance	Results
Obtaining information about customer behavior	3.8725	385	43.018	0.000	Significant
Customer engagement in digital business media	3.2353	385	31.350	0.000	Significant

Table 4. Results related to digital marketing challenges and its strategies

Factors	Mean	DoF	T-statistic	significance	Results
Lack of financial resources, especially after the corona epidemic to present a new product	3.7843	385	33.600	0.000	Significant
Lack of sufficient business development and granting representation in recent years	4.0098	385	47.702	0.000	Significant
Not considering the interests of customers in the design of their products	4.0980	385	50.955	0.000	Significant
Lack of sufficient understanding of psychological and demographic characteristics of customers	4.3529	385	52.466	0.000	Significant
Failure to choose the right platform for advertising	4.1961	385	47.026	0.000	Significant
Failure of advertisements to focus on the needs and interests of customers	4.2647	385	47.284	0.000	Significant

Table 5. Results related to digital marketing strategies and its strategies

Networking with other actors	Mean	DoF	T-statistic	significance	Results
Ability to internally develop business	4.1176	385	47.805	0.000	Significant
Attract more financial and non-financial resources	4.0196	385	42.015	0.000	Significant
Attracting international investors	3.3333	385	30.089	0.000	Significant
Cooperation with other famous brands to inject investment	4.1176	385	49.140	0.000	Significant
Informing the audience and creating an advertising platform	4.0784	385	52.193	0.000	Significant
Using the facilities and power of other actors	4.0784	385	47.734	0.000	Significant
Attracting more information sources	4.1569	385	53.158	0.000	Significant
Development of activities with customer knowledge	4.0000	385	43.232	0.000	Significant
Networking with other actors	3.8824	385	41.327	0.000	Significant

In the above Tables, the mean column indicates the mean of the responses that can be seen, all of them are higher than 3, which indicates the high level of agreement of people with the extracted factors. In addition, the column related to the T statistic shows the calculated value of this statistic for each of the factors.

If the calculated values for the T-statistic are greater than 1.96, the extracted factor is significant at the

0.05 level, and if the values are greater than 2.58, the factor is significant at the 0.01 error level. As can be seen in the Tables (3), (4) and (5), all the calculated values are greater than 2.58, therefore, it can be said that the factors affecting digital marketing management and its strategies, namely, the challenges of IKEA in digital marketing management as well as suggestions for improving digital marketing management in this company are significant at the 0.01 error level.

It can be seen from the relevant Tables that the significance level for all the items is equal to 0.000, which is due to the large values of the T statistic.

* Conclusion

The results showed that the challenges of digital marketing in the furniture industry are the following: -

- 1- Lack of financial resources, especially after the Corona epidemic, to provide a new product
- 2- Lack of sufficient business development and representation in recent years
- 3- Not considering the interests of customers in the design of their products
- 4- Lack of sufficient understanding of psychological and demographic characteristics of customers
- 5- Failure to choose the right platform

for advertising

6- Lack of advertising focus on the needs and interests of customers

some of these factors are related to marketing tools in the digital environment, for which the company must plan and use the strategies presented to achieve future growth paths in the digital environment through digital marketing management and appropriate strategizing.

The results of the present research, on the one hand, in line with the fact that some researchers have emphasized that the Internet and digitalization have led to changes in marketing paradigms, business classification and marketing mix, showed that these things absolutely need attention and It is an investigation and the extraction of the digital marketing strategy model in this research shows the necessity of a deep paradigm analysis to understand the competition and content of the strategy in cyber space.

One of the most important operational limitations of the current research was the lack of possibility of providing a customer journey in the digital space for the business under investigation, as well as the rapid change and evolution in the variables under investigation due to the nature of the environment company and the

lack of competitors for this particular industry under investigation.

In this section, practical suggestions have been presented based on the results of the current research, as well as the researcher's suggestions for future research.

Suggestions based on research results: -

1- Since the businesses active in the furniture industry need completely new models for their digital marketing department, it is suggested to examine the content and process of these businesses in a special way.

2- It is also suggested to create additional studies about the customer, focusing on her/his different journeys in the mentioned businesses.

3- Due to the central role of the customer component in all businesses, it is considered important to design specific researches to analyze consumer behavior in cyberspace. Extensive research is needed in this field.

4- Finally, interdisciplinary research with the cooperation of marketing and information and communication technology specialists can become a basis for creating a competitive advantage in this field in improving platforms and also search patterns in search engines.

Other suggestions: -

1- The marketing managers of the

online and offline stores of the IKEA furniture company are suggested to use the advertising strategy (paid promotion) more than two content and product strategies.

2- It is also suggested that in order to increase the success of their marketing strategies, they pay more attention to the customer retention factor than other factors. It is suggested to be diligent in keeping customers by giving discounts to customers with more purchases, giving gift cards, etc.

3- It is suggested to pay attention to the referral factor and give rewards such as commission, discount, gift card, etc. to customers who introduce others and are identified as referrals.

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