

Review Paper

# Digital Marketing and its Role in Customer Acquisition

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## ABSTRACT

The study examines the role of digital marketing in customer acquisition. The relevance of this research is driven by the fact that marketing is increasingly encompassing various industries today. One of its main tasks is to acquire new customers. At the same time, the growing number of companies producing goods with similar specifications means that marketing is beginning to use the latest technologies to increase its target audience actively. As a result, the topic of digital marketing's role in the cultivation of customer loyalty is becoming an acute issue. The study aims to discover the role of digital marketing in customer acquisition. The research object is digital marketing strategies. Research methods. The following research methods were employed in this paper: description, analysis and synthesis, comparison, generalization, and modelling. The article is dedicated to unravelling the role of digital marketing in customer acquisition. The authors describe the impact of factors such as the virtual space, competition, the accessibility of the average consumer to the Internet, and the lack of qualified personnel in marketing on the application of digital marketing in business activities. The study characterizes the essence of the "digital marketing" concept in broad and specific contexts. In addition, the authors identified the advantages of digital marketing and its components. The article analyzes the main features of digital marketing applied to customer acquisition. They include the Internet, mobile devices, digital television, interactive screens, and local networks. The article summarizes digital marketing methods for attracting customers. The authors investigate customer acquisition methods such as contextual advertising, retargeting, mobile marketing, viral marketing, Big Data, RTB, SMM, SEO, SMO, SEM, and email marketing. During the research, a model was developed that presents the main trends associated with digital marketing in the context of customer acquisition. These trends include ads harmoniously embedded in content, online advertising being widely present in the virtual space, advertising customized to a specific category's needs, advertising in various formats, and customer acquisition by forming a virtual community. This article categorizes customer acquisition tools into three groups: paid resources, owned resources, and earned resources.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The study emphasizes the role of digital marketing in overcoming customer acquisition challenges by utilizing innovative technologies to present products, attract new customers, and engage the target audience. It defines the "digital marketing" concept broadly as the virtual space marketing aimed at customer attraction.

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- ① The research aims to define digital marketing, describe digital channels for customer acquisition, outline methods for attracting customers, and summarize trends in digital marketing. It identifies challenges, especially in the SMM method, and suggests more focus on automated tools like RTB, SEO, SMO, and SEM

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**Keywords:** Internet, customer, user, marketing, product, consumer, goods, digital marketing

Customer acquisition challenges are common for every company. One of the reasons for this is that by implementing a set of marketing activities, a company tries to reach as many of its target audience as possible. Simultaneously, competition and the need for staff upskilling influence companies to increasingly leverage digital marketing tools for customer acquisition. It enables quick customer outreach, more effective product or service presentations, timely user feedback collection, and accurate analysis.

The use of digital marketing technologies reduces the workload on the company's staff, as the selected system automatically performs its assigned tasks. Therefore, the company saves on wages by replacing the work of numerous people. However, digital marketing tools for customer acquisition also cost significantly. Thus, the digital marketing methods that yield the best results are selected depending on the target audience, their needs, social status, and preferences. Consequently, this topic remains relevant for research.

The study aims to reveal the role of digital marketing in acquiring customers. The purpose of the study is determined by the fact that the use of innovative technologies allows to present the product more actively and attract new customers. It also allows us to talk about the importance of digital marketing in cultivating the brand's target audience.

According to the aim of the study, the following goals are set:

- ♦ to define the essence of the "digital marketing" concept;
- ♦ to describe digital channels of customer acquisition in digital marketing;
- ♦ to describe digital marketing methods for attracting customers;
- ♦ to summarize the main trends related to digital marketing in terms of customer acquisition.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of digital marketing and its role in

customer acquisition has been explored by domestic researchers such as N. Drokina (2018), N. Kordzaya (2018), V. Mazurenko (2011), O. Marchuk (2018), and I. Smetanyuk (2020). According to their opinions, a company will only have the opportunity to build a significant customer base if they use digital marketing tools. In fact, the virtual space is a community where any product can be presented and find the desired number of consumers. Furthermore, researchers are convinced that digital marketing will be able to replace traditional marketing instruments virtually in the coming decade.

In particular, O. Marchuk, in the article "Digital Marketing as an Innovative Management Tool," points out that to achieve success in customer acquisition, a company must utilize various marketing methods (Marchuk, 2018, p. 296). She emphasizes the importance of SMM as a means of interacting with the target audience through social networks. At the same time, the scholar believes that a current challenge in digital marketing is the lack of qualified professionals who possess innovative technologies and an understanding of consumer psychology.

Additionally, the study by I. Smetanyuk, "SMM in Ukraine: Features and Development Prospects," allocates a significant role to SMM in customer acquisition (Smetanyuk, 2020). At the same time, the scholar concurs with O. Marchuk that attracting customers is most effectively accomplished through social media. She underscores the importance of consistently posting photos and videos about a product or service, stimulating customers to purchase or inquire about services. Furthermore, the scholar believes that posting reviews about products or services on the page has a considerable impact on increasing the number of customers.

Therefore, the analyzed database of scientific papers on this topic is sufficient for the study. The article also focuses on those methods that, according to researchers, allow for more active consumer engagement and ineffective ones.

## METHODS

The following research methods were used in this study: description, analysis and synthesis, comparison, generalization, and modelling. The description method was used to present digital customer acquisition channels in digital marketing. The analysis and synthesis methods were used to determine the essence of the concept of digital marketing. The comparison method was used to compare the main characteristics of digital marketing customer acquisition methods. The generalization method was used to present the main trends associated with digital marketing in the context of customer acquisition.

The modelling method was used to construct models of digital marketing methods for customer acquisition and key trends associated with digital marketing for customer acquisition. In this way, the main parameters of these phenomena were presented, and their components were shown to be interrelated.

## RESULTS

The issue of customer acquisition is crucial for many companies today. The reason for this is that for a company to expand its target audience, it needs to use such mechanisms of influence on potential consumers that would encourage them to buy or try a particular product from a specific manufacturer. It requires coordination among various departments and divisions within the company. In other words, senior management must prioritize engaging consumers rather than solely focusing on producing a high-quality product. As a result, product quality may suffer, and the required number of consumers may not be attracted. Furthermore, it is necessary to engage the target audience and find new potential customers consistently. Again, it requires coordination among different departments (Nikonenko *et al.* 2022; Bayev *et al.* 2022).

In modern conditions, the challenge of customer acquisition is further complicated by the lack of qualified personnel. Quite often, it is difficult to find an expert who can interest potential consumers and effectively demonstrate the key advantages of the product. At the same time, it is necessary to know the psychology of customers and possess a high level of innovative technologies. Such a person

may have the required skills to perform job duties but may lack proficiency in computer technologies, which are essential for comprehensive product promotion (Brand, 2020, p. 8).

Additionally, in the face of increasing competition, capturing consumers' interest in a product that offers both high quality and moderate cost is challenging. It is essential to identify the specific advantages that are necessary only for a particular category of consumers and that allow the customer to choose this product. Therefore, marketing today is focused not only on presenting the product's strengths but also on finding new ways to attract customers. As virtual space is becoming a more significant part of our lives, the average customer is not interested in or cannot use traditional channels to get information about a product or service (Wind, 2020, p. 43).

In particular, it is now quite rare to find advertisements for specific products in printed publications or newspapers. Additionally, people who read printed materials rarely pay attention to ads, even if they appear more vibrant compared to the main text. There is a reason for this: today, customer engagement mostly takes place in the virtual space. A person who sees an advertisement on the Internet understands that after reading the ad text, they can follow a link or find the company's website online, collect sufficient information about the product, determine convenient payment and delivery methods, compare the parameters of the advertised product from one manufacturer with those of a similar product from another manufacturer, and assess the feasibility of the purchase. In contrast, this is impossible or difficult to achieve when a person uses traditional means to obtain product information (Svoboda, 2020, p. 4).

Therefore, it can be noted that the virtual space, competition, the accessibility of the average consumer to the Internet, and the lack of qualified personnel in marketing have influenced the fact that customer acquisition now predominantly takes place through digital marketing. This tool allows for improving the efficiency of a company's marketing activities and organizing systematic efforts to attract customers and increase profits (Chaffey, 2015, p. 7).

Currently, there is no single definition of "digital marketing." This phenomenon is new and involves

various processes that are difficult to regulate. In a general sense, “digital marketing” is “the marketing of goods and services conducted in the virtual space, aimed at attracting customers through digital channels” (Marchuk, 2018, p. 296). Also, there are such interpretations as:

- ♦ “marketing activity that interacts with different market segments through digital channels;”
- ♦ “marketing that involves interacting with customers and businesses using information and communication technologies;”
- ♦ “marketing implemented through information and communication technologies;”
- ♦ “marketing that promotes a brand through all digital channels” (Cook, 2019, p. 23).

All of these definitions emphasize the interplay between business, customers, and the digital space.

Digital marketing is an integral component of modern information society. In particular, digitization enhances interaction with existing customers and allows for acquiring new ones. Traditional means of information dissemination, such as distributing leaflets and business cards, radio, television, print publications, and advertising billboards in public places, do not fall into this category (Mia *et al.* 2022).

The advantages of digital marketing are as follows:

1. Digital marketing enables reaching both online and offline consumers who use tablets and mobile phones, play games, and download applications. It allows a brand to address a broader audience without limiting itself to the Internet.
2. The ability to gather precise and detailed data. Virtually all user actions in the digital environment are recorded by analytical systems. This enables making accurate conclusions about the effectiveness of different promotion channels and creating an accurate customer profile.
3. A flexible approach - digital marketing allows attracting offline audiences to the online market and vice versa. For example, using a QR code on a flyer can direct a user to a website. Simultaneously, through email marketing, you can invite subscribers to a

seminar or another offline event (Lashgari, 2020, p. 5).

In general, digital marketing includes three components:

- ♦ Content (blog posts, articles, publications, research, eBooks, sales page copy, newsletters, social media campaigns, SEO).
- ♦ Design (incorporating photos and images for content, infographics, diagrams, photos, and videos).
- ♦ Statistics (analytics, key performance indicators, goals and objectives, conversion channels, customer LTV) (Hudders, 2020, p. 2).

Internet marketing is one of the main components of digital marketing. It includes website analysis and promotion, video communication tools in virtual space and methods of online product promotion. These are the tools that allow companies to promote products and expand their audience based on them. At the same time, other essential components of digital marketing are advertising and promotion on digital platforms outside the virtual space (Slobodianyuk *et al.* 2022). Therefore, if Internet marketing only includes platforms and technologies for product promotion, digital marketing also includes a context that can be promoted and engage consumers even without Internet access.

Consequently, in digital marketing, not all actions need to take place over the Internet to achieve the desired result. In addition, some processes can also be carried out through digital forms of information delivery. Specifically, the offline environment that allows communication between customers and brands can include smartphone applications, messaging applications for exchanging messages, and advertising displays in public places. In this case, the implementation of digital marketing occurs through monitors, radio, digital communication, television, specialized programs, and the Internet (Piñeiro-Otero, 2016, p. 18).

Digital marketing involves the use of digital channels such as the Internet, mobile devices, digital television, interactive screens, and local networks to attract more customers. The Internet can be used to disseminate information about a product or service to different target audiences. In addition, the advantage of virtual space lies in the infinite

number of messages and announcements, as there is no physical limit to the amount of information. As a result, by disseminating information about a product or service on the Internet, a company can be sure that it will be received by a sufficient number of people or even more. This will allow the company to achieve its goals (Almeida, 2014, p. 2).

Local networks are used to attract specific customers. In other words, if a company is sure that a consumer will definitely be interested in a certain product, the necessary information is sent to the potential customer. In this case, the local network can be limited to a specific area or premises, making such a digital channel less effective for customer acquisition (Ryan, 2014, p. 23).

Mobile devices are not only communication tools but also tools for attracting many potential customers. In this case, a mobile device can be used for viewing advertisements or product information in a virtual device, as well as for receiving data in an app or through messages in a messenger installed on the phone. Such a digital channel is very effective because almost all potential customers use mobile phones. Therefore, there is a high probability that the customer who happens to see the product advertisement will be engaged (Star, 2020, p. 11).

Digital television includes not only TV sets installed in everyone’s home but also those TV devices placed in public places and in certain facilities. They allow to attract lots of people who, having received the necessary information, will decide to make a

purchase. In particular, if a customer is waiting for something, for example, in a queue, they have the opportunity to watch a large number of videos on digital television. Thus, they can find the ones they are interested in, increasing their chances of attracting them (Stokes, 2021, p. 29).

Interactive screens are the digital channels that allow companies to influence a potential customer with a vivid picture and concise content. They are aimed at a specific target audience and can be located in various public places, public transport, and in certain organizations and institutions. Such screens display thematic advertising and encourage potential customers to buy a specific product or use services. In particular, we can see such interactive screens in stores that display information about the brand, products, promotions, and new products. This is important for those customers who find it challenging to navigate and want to try something new. For this reason, interactive channels engage them in interaction with the product and brand (Ryan, 2009, p. 27).

Digital marketing uses the following methods to attract customers. They are shown in Fig. 1.

Contextual advertising is considered the most effective among all digital marketing methods. It is associated with the user’s recent search queries, thereby displaying content relevant to their specific needs. The value of this method lies in the fact that it can present advertisements based on a user’s previous query, potentially fulfilling their needs.



Source: Author’s elaboration.

Fig. 1: Digital marketing methods for customer acquisition

For instance, if someone is searching for sportswear, contextual advertising can display ads related to sports themes (“Contextual advertising: everything a business owner needs to know about it”).

The “Big data” is another important method of digital marketing. This phenomenon is characterized by the ability to store large volumes of data, requiring extended retention periods. Concerning customer acquisition, this tool is practical for maintaining customer databases. A company with an extensive database of potential clients can utilize this phenomenon to store it for an extended period and carry out customer acquisition efforts only at specific times, such as when a new product is launching. Additionally, this tool can be employed to store detailed information about products or company activities, attracting new consumers in the future (Yershova, 2020, p. 2).

Mobile marketing is a method of interaction between a company and a user through a mobile phone. This tool is effective as customers use smartphones or regular mobile phones daily, making this form of communication more productive. It includes SMS messaging, interaction within specialized apps, and the ability to communicate directly within a phone application. For companies, it offers the opportunity to reach more customers in a shorter period. At the same time, for customers, it provides a quick way to access necessary services (Mazurenko, 2011, p. 24).

Viral marketing can be considered one of the most effective methods. Its peculiarity is due to the fact that certain advertising information is disseminated, which is often provocative. The calculation here relies on the idea that the received data will interest one person, who will then inform others. In turn, the latter will spread the information to more users. Typically, this is an advertising message that may shock in terms of its form, presentation, or content. Such a marketing tool can quickly reach a large audience and significantly expand the range of customers. It is crucial that the advertising product can be easily distributed or copied (Kordzaya, 2018, p. 340).

The RTB method is modern and helps to reach the largest number of users. It is based on the fact that an online purchase is made through a virtual bidding process to show an ad to a specific person. Thus, only a particular company can show its ads

to users it is interested in. At the same time, the main indicators of the client are taken into account. It helps to determine the format of advertising that will interest the client the most, as well as the time in which they will be able to perceive the information. This marketing tool is effective as it uses various algorithms for evaluating the target audience and advertising. Nevertheless, this method has the disadvantage that, for specific reasons, the customer may not be interested at all in the advertisement of this product or a specific brand (Hnitetskyi, 2017, p. 125).

The SMM is the digital marketing method that probably impacts customer acquisition the most. The essence of this method lies in the fact that a company or brand uses social media as a way to increase its target audience. At the same time, social networks are now the social platforms that are used by almost every user of the virtual space for their needs. Accordingly, using social media allows for quick customer acquisition, while popularizing a product or service will significantly increase the profit level (Akimova *et al.* 2022; Levytska *et al.*, 2022).

Notably, customer acquisition is possible through mainstream social networks (Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter) and special ones which can be used only by people in a particular category. At the same time, it is best to attract customers using multimedia social networks, where customers can communicate, share photos and videos, and disseminate personal information, as these platforms allow for various forms of advertising (Smetanyuk, 2020, p. 2).

As a marketing tool, SMO involves a company actively engaging in social media for brand recognition. In practice, it means that the organization conducts most of its activities on its own social media page, giving less attention to its official website. The company actively maintains a blog, posts photos and videos, updates on its activities, and organizes events to engage customers. This approach contributes to brand recognition and customer loyalty (What is SMO).

The SMO marketing tool means that a company actively uses social media to build brand awareness. In particular, a company actually conducts all its activities on its own social media page while paying less attention to the official page. A company or

institution actively maintains a blog where they post photos and videos, news about their activities, and organize events to attract customers. At the same time, this mechanism promotes brand awareness and customer loyalty (What is SMO).

The SEO method involves analyzing an institution's website to improve its performance and attract more users. This tool provides for the identification of the main aspects of the page's functioning, as well as helps to evaluate its content. It also determines the ranking of the site and related pages. This tool helps to identify page traffic and determine which category of users interacts with particular content the most. As a result, the company has an opportunity to attract more customers, as it understands the advantages and disadvantages of its product and realizes who its content can be designed for. In other words, the company understands for whom it needs to create advertising and information messages (Drokina, 2018, p. 127).

As a tool, the SEM method increases a website's popularity and the brand's awareness. This can be achieved both with the help of artificial means of promotion and with the help of a marketing complex of mechanisms. These mechanisms can effectively disseminate information about a brand. This method can attract more users than other ways of increasing demand. In addition, this tool involves virtual reputation management. Its essence lies in the fact that any negative comment or review that can negatively affect the image of a company or brand is immediately displayed and quickly eliminated. It also uses analytics to analyze all user actions when interacting with content. It allows companies to identify the typical features of customer behavior online (Hnylyakevych-Prots, 2021, p. 18).

Today, email marketing is one of the key digital marketing tools. Its essence manifests in customers receiving a newsletter to their email addresses. The company sends an advertising or informational announcement containing information about a particular product, new product, promotional offers or discounts. This method is quite personalized, as the company sends messages only to its customers via email. It prevents the dissemination of information to those who are not interested in receiving a particular message. At the same time, the disadvantage of such a tool is that customers

do not check their mail daily or use temporary email accounts and, therefore, may perceive such information as spam (Hryniv, 2021, p. 50).

Retargeting is another effective digital marketing method that helps to attract customers. The essence of retargeting manifests itself in the fact that product ads are displayed only to customers who have previously interacted with the advertised product page. In other words, it is actually a reminder to the client about a specific brand and familiarization with new products. After all, a person who has already been interested in the services of a certain company or its products is likely to apply for products next time. Moreover, it is necessary to take into account the specifics of the interaction and all those aspects that are related to the user's previous request. In other words, if they were looking for summer clothes on the brand's page in the spring, it is likely that they will look for fall clothes in the summer (Haychenko, 2019, p. 90).

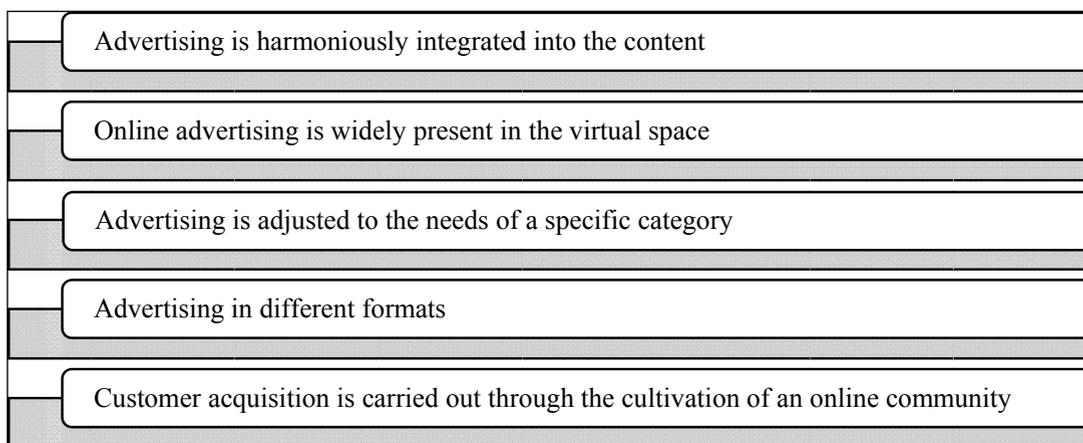
Importantly, using several digital marketing methods to attract customers is effective. However, the problematic issues include as follows:

- ♦ the company's budget, as such promotion methods are expensive;
- ♦ the availability of relevant specialists, as a specialist must understand marketing processes and be proficient in computer technology;
- ♦ the need for interaction between different departments (Akhtar, 2019, p. 2).

As of 2023, the following main trends related to digital marketing regarding customer acquisition can be noted (Silva, 2022, p. 24). They are shown in Fig. 2.

There are numerous tools available to attract customers in digital marketing. They can be divided into 3 main groups:

1. paid resources: for which companies need to pay;
2. own resources: websites, pages in social networks that the business owns and can manage;
3. earned resources: the so-called word of mouth or earned media - free or purchased communication channels (Borodina *et al.* 2022).



Source: Author's elaboration.

Fig. 2: The main trends related to digital marketing regarding customer acquisition

The group's choice depends on both the company's financial capacities and its interest in attracting consumers.

## DISCUSSION

This study has identified several challenging aspects of the current digital marketing vision to attract customers. In particular, the analyzed scientific papers focus on such a digital marketing method as SMM. At the same time, even though this tool is quite effective, it requires constant work with social media and audience analysis for the company to gain new customers. It would be advisable to pay more attention to those methods that automatically monitor customers and the virtual space and offer the client an advertisement according to a specific algorithm. In particular, these are RTB, SEO, SMO, and SEM.

Also, the connection between digital marketing and customer psychology could be better explained. In particular, the following aspects should be revealed:

- ♦ How do consumers of different target audiences perceive innovative technologies?
- ♦ Which marketing tools do customers trust more?
- ♦ Why do the same marketing technologies in the virtual space have different effectiveness in interacting with customers?

## CONCLUSION

The research allowed us to draw the following conclusions. They are based on the importance

of considering the impact of digital marketing on customer acquisition.

The authors have defined the essence of the "digital marketing" concept. This concept is quite broad and has different interpretations. The most common understanding is that it means "marketing of goods and services carried out in the virtual space, aimed at attracting customers through digital channels". The main components here are marketing, virtual space, and client. In general, it is the application of various means of influencing customers to gain their loyalty.

The article describes digital channels of customer acquisition in digital marketing. The main digital channels for attracting customers are the Internet, mobile devices, digital television, interactive screens, and local area networks. Currently, much attention is paid to the Internet and interactive channels as spaces allowing the client to display personal information.

The authors describe digital marketing methods for attracting customers. In modern conditions, such methods of attracting customers as contextual advertising, retargeting, mobile marketing, viral marketing, Big Data, RTB, SMM, SEO, SMO, SEM, and email marketing have become widespread. Particular attention is paid to SMM, as the use of social media allows companies to communicate more effectively with consumers and engage them in cooperation. At the same time, it is advisable to use several tools to achieve better results.

In addition, the main trends related to digital marketing in terms of customer acquisition are summarized. The main trends in customer acquisition through digital marketing are as follows:

- ♦ ads are harmoniously integrated into the content;
- ♦ online advertising is widely present in the virtual space;
- ♦ advertising is adjusted to the needs of a specific category;
- ♦ advertising has various formats;
- ♦ customer acquisition through the development of a virtual community.

All these tools have a significant impact on consumer preferences and their desire to become loyal to the brand.

Therefore, digital marketing can be assumed to be more actively used to attract customers in the future. In particular, new tools will emerge that will allow an effective use of social networks and special websites to influence consumers.

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