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A Systematic Literature Review of Trends in Digital Marketing Research in Romania

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Abstract. *In the contemporary world, the significance of technology has become increasingly paramount. Hence, we are living in times in which the theme of digitalization is a transformative force, reshaping our daily lives and fundamentally altering the way we interact, work, and perceive the world around us. The paper aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis of digital marketing research in Romania. A total of 37 studies were found and systematized using inclusion and exclusion criteria. The papers were selected only if they featured research on digital marketing in the Romanian market. Using this search strategy, a literature review was conducted based on papers extracted from the Web of Science database. As a result, 16 papers were evaluated. Although the analyzed articles highlight quite a variety of things, the papers emphasize that digital marketing is an emerging subject in the Romanian market. This paper adds to the existing body of knowledge that digital marketing can be viewed from three perspectives: the impact of digital marketing strategies on consumer behavior in the technology era, exploring the nexus of digital marketing and social media: consumer engagement, trends, and impact, and digital marketing transformations across industries: trends, challenges, and opportunities.*

Keywords: digital, digital marketing, systematic literature review, research, Romania.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, the significance of technology has become increasingly paramount. Hence, we are living in times in which the theme of digitalization is a transformative force, reshaping our daily lives and fundamentally altering the way we interact, work, and perceive the world around us. Thus, the idea of digital marketing has emerged as an indispensable companion, intricately woven into the very essence of modern business strategies.

Digital marketing is a hot field that has its origins in the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, with the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web platform, in the context of the information society (Ayhan, 2017). Thus, businesses had to adapt their ways of interacting with their customers to promote products and services (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Over time, digital marketing has evolved from the simple interaction of customers with the website of the company or the product, to the exploitation of modern digital technologies, such as digital devices and platforms (e.g., Internet of Things, Facebook, Instagram, Google, YouTube, etc.), digital media (e.g. email marketing, search engines, etc.), digital data (e.g. audience profile information) and digital technology (e.g. chatbot) (Dwivedi, et al., 2021).

The topic of digital marketing has experienced swift global expansion, with Romania being no exception, particularly in recent years. The important role of digital marketing in the economy is demonstrated by the fact that, in 2023, expenditures in this field, globally, reached the value of

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679.7 billion USD, and the largest investments were in the United States of America (306.7 billion USD) (Statista, 2024). In Romania, some studies reflect the fact that, in 2022, over 72% of total marketing budgets were intended for digital marketing channels (GpeC, 2024).

The state-of-art review confirms the absence of a universal, and well-structured definition of digital marketing. Although there is no internationally recognized definition, digital marketing is considered “the marketing of products or services using digital technologies, mainly on the Internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium” (Desai, 2019). Digital marketing is influenced by various factors such as audiences, platforms, technologies used, quality content, inputs and expenditures, and interactions (Balaji, 2021). The most common digital marketing channels are the following: Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, Affiliate Marketing, Native Advertising, Marketing Automation, Pay-Per-Click (PPC), Email Marketing, Inbound Marketing, and Online PR (Alexander, 2022).

Against this background, this paper seeks to identify and present the trends in digital marketing research in Romania. To achieve the aims of the paper, the authors employed a systematic literature review. Even though completing a systematic literature review is not something new in academic research, the novelty lies in its thematic focus: trends in digital marketing research in Romania. Although the analyzed articles highlight quite varied reasons, the topic should take into account emerging technologies, expectations, and perceptions of the customers.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the methodology, followed by the “Results and discussions” section. The paper ends with conclusions, along with their limitations and research perspectives.

Methodology

In order to attain the aim of the paper, the authors carried out a systematic literature review that includes several phases, based on the methodology presented by Lamé (2019). Firstly, the authors of this study formulate a review question. They researched *trends in digital marketing research in Romania.* Secondly, they define the inclusion and exclusion criteria presented in Table 1, as follows:

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
The scope of the study	Papers that focus on Digital marketing.	Papers outside the scope of the research question.
Date of publication	Papers published from January 2020 until December 2023.	Papers published before January 2020 and after December 2023 fall into an out-of-date period.
Country	Papers that focus on the Romanian market.	Papers without focus in the Romanian market.
Language	All papers that are published must be in the English language.	Omit any papers that have not been published in the English language.
Document Type	Papers that are described as “Article”.	All other document types (e.g., proceeding paper, early access, review article, book chapters, etc.) were excluded
Web of Science Categories	Papers that are included in the following categories: economics, business, management, or business finance.	Papers that are included in other categories were excluded.
Number of citations	Paper with a minimum of 1 Web of Science citation.	Papers without Web of Science citations were excluded.

Source: Authors’ own research.

Thirdly, they define the search strategy. Thus, considering the previously stated criteria, the authors performed a literature analysis in the Web of Science database. The research was initiated with title and abstract screening, followed by a full-text review. The initial search generated 37 papers, of which 16 fit the considered criteria. The articles were evaluated to identify if they deal with digital marketing research.

Results and discussions

On reading the 16 articles in the review (Table 2), a descriptive method of analysis was undertaken. It explored the structure, research methods, and analysis of the data used by the articles.

Table 2. Basic information of the reviewed articles

Code number	Title	Authors	Journal	Publication Year	Number of citations on 21st of February 2024
1	Industrial engineering 4.0 – upgrading the industrial costumers' path to the zdigital economy	Székely et al.	Polish Journal of Management Studies	2020	5
2	Digitalization and Labor Market-A Perspective within the Framework of Pandemic Crisis	Piroșcă et al.	Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research	2021	24
3	Don't miss out on NFTs?! A sentiment-based analysis of the early NFT market	Horky et al.	International Review of Economics & Finance	2023	1
4	Digital Marketing Effects of Clubhouse on Crowdfunding in the Context of COVID-19	Konhäusner, and Seidentopf.	Journal of Risk and Financial Management	2021	1
5	Measuring Customer Engagement in Social Media Marketing: A Higher-Order Model	Vinerean and Opreana	Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research	2021	20
6	Current trends and perspectives in tyre industry	Chicu et al.	Studia Universitatias "Vasile Goldiș" Arad – Seria Științe Economice	2020	2
7	Digitization and population welfare in the new EU member states	Pelinescu et al.	Romanian Journal of Economic Forecasting	2021	2
8	Matching the future capabilities of an artificial intelligence-based software for social media marketing with potential users' expectations	Căpățînă et al.	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	2020	40
9	Improving the school-to-work transition for young people by closing the digital divide: evidence from the EU regions	Răileanu Szeles and Simionescu	International Journal of Manpower	2021	3
10	The adoption of the metaverse concepts in Romania	Chinie et al.	Management & Marketing Challenges for the Knowledge Society	2022	5
11	Eye Tracking and an A/B Split Test for Social Media Marketing Optimisation: The Connection	Nichifor et al.	Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research	2021	1

Code number	Title	Authors	Journal	Publication Year	Number of citations on 21st of February 2024
	between the User Profile and Ad Creative Components				
12	The Common Values of Social Media Marketing and Luxury Brands. The Millennials and Generation Z Perspective	Dobre et al.	Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research	2021	10
13	Using CSR communication through social media for developing long-term customer relationships. The case of Romanian consumers	Topor et al.	Economic computation and economic cybernetics studies and research	2022	4
14	Business model innovation through the use of digital technologies: managing risks and creating sustainability	Tohănean et al.	Amfiteatru Economic	2020	23
15	Fundamental Power of Social Media Interactions for Building a Brand and Customer Relations	Oncioiu et al.	Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research	2021	9
16	Price search behaviour in digital markets - A perspective from Romania	Vrânceanu et al.	Management & Marketing Challenges for the Knowledge Society	2020	5

Source: Authors' own research.

Out of the 16 reviewed articles, 5 of them were published in 2020, 8 of them in 2021, 2 of them in 2022, and 1 of them in 2023. These papers were published in journals with the main focus being on economics, business, finance, management, and marketing. The majority of studies presented quantitative research, with some of them also containing qualitative research. The total number of citations in the Web of Science database is 134.

The rapid advancement of economic growth, digital transformation, and the globalization of business have led certain entities to generate or acquire intangible assets (IA). These assets have become progressively crucial for economic prosperity, playing a significant role in determining a company's global value. Furthermore, they serve as a key incentive in the creation of added value. Thereby, analyzing these articles, we notice that they can be divided into 3 major themes: the impact of digital marketing strategies on consumer behavior in the technology era, exploring the nexus of digital marketing and social media: consumer engagement, trends, and impact, and digital marketing transformations across industries: trends, challenges, and opportunities.

The impact of digital marketing strategies on consumer behavior in the technology era

In their work, Székely et al. (2020) deal with new ways of interaction between suppliers and customers in industrial marketing and they state that, in business-to-business activity, a company becomes an industrial customer by going through the following steps: aware (to know about a product or distributor), appeal (to feel attracted), ask (to search for product information), act (to order, to ask for price offer), advocate (to become ”the lawyer of the supplier” or a fan of it). Other authors tested the perception of the young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET-youth) regarding digital transformation. They concluded that the utilization of internet activities is expanded to reach a larger demographic leading to decreased NEET youth rates when compared to the segment of the population possessing only fundamental digital skills. However, both factors are identified as significant drivers for the reintegration of NEET individuals (Răileanu Szeles & Simionescu, 2021).

Discussing the emerging technologies and their role in digital marketing, Chinie et al. (2022) investigated the status of the adoption of the metaverse concepts in Romania, among people with digital skills. The paper highlighted that the idea of the metaverse has become widely known among technology users; however, only a small percentage have actively interacted with applications that are now recognized as part of the metaverse or have acquired metaverse tokens.

In their article, Vrânceanu, Ţuclea, and Ţigu (2020) seek to identify and delineate the relationships between the behavior of searching for prices in the online environment, and the purchasing process. The most important findings of the research indicate that as customers engage in more online price information searches, they develop enhanced search abilities. This heightened ability makes them more inclined to perceive greater value in online shopping, consequently fostering an increased intention to make purchases from the Internet.

Exploring the nexus of digital marketing and social media: consumer engagement, trends, and impact

Vinerean and Opreana (2021) examined customer engagement in social media marketing, considering three antecedents (involvement, customer participation, commitment) and a main consequence (loyalty). The study discovered customer engagement as an influencing factor in customer loyalty, offering valuable perspectives on the relationships that lead to loyalty. Furthermore, the authors affirm that customer engagement is a crucial element in cultivating meaningful customer-brand relationships and is a prerequisite for nurturing loyalty. Furthermore, in their paper, Konhäusner, and Seidentopf (2021) have considered aspects related to the social audio platform, Clubhouse, which has crowdfunding campaigns. First of all, their study reveals that social audio can become an additional field of marketing research. Moreover, they provide some ideas regarding the use of digital marketing, in general, and new social media networks, especially, to reach a new audience, provide additional ways of interaction, and complement their social media marketing mix with Clubhouse.

Căpăţână et al. (2020) investigated how the potential users of an AI-based software (owners and employees from digital agencies, and freelancers from these countries, with expertise in SMM) perceive its capabilities. In the article, the authors determined that in Romania, the synergy between the deep-learning algorithms' capability to recognize places and moments of product consumption, along with the ability to correlate sales by forecasting the frequency of a brand appearing in social media photos, constitutes the causal formula that leads to a heightened interest in the image analysis module of an AI-driven media software. Moreover, the topic of digital marketing in the context of social media is treated in the paper entitled “Don't miss out on NFTs?! A sentiment-based analysis of the early NFT market” (Horky, Dubbick, Rhein, & Fidrmuc, 2023). The authors conclude that there are weak links between established cryptocurrencies and the NFT market, in the context of the Twitter social network. Moreover, traders and policymakers could use social media activities to monitor new digital markets.

In their study, Nichifor et al. (2021) aim to discover and summarize the key optimizations regarding the creative ad components needed to run highly personalized ads based on a user profile on the Facebook social network. They concluded that the approaches differ depending on the gender of the customer: for women when the objective is to raise brand awareness, it is necessary to show them a happy human face, while men react to technical details.

Dobre et al. (2021) used the generational theory in their paper. So, they tried to determine the extent to which Millennials and Generation Z consumers perceive compatibility between social media marketing and luxury brands. They found that for Millennials and Generation Z, luxury brands are compatible with social media apps as marketing channels. Moreover, they discover that managers can still use the facilities of digital technologies to depict exclusivity, emotions, and sensory experiences specific to luxury.

In their study, Topor et al. (2022) investigate the relationship between CSR communication through social media platforms and customer and corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and customer trust. The findings underscore the importance of integrating the communication of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives into the overall corporate communication strategy, especially through social media platforms. This integration plays a crucial role in fostering enduring relationships between companies and their customers. Moreover, Oncioiu et al. (2021) aimed to establish the basis for recognizing correlations between the interactive potential of social media, characterized by dialogue-oriented communication, and the quality of relationships with online customers. The study outcomes underscore the significance of companies grasping the role of interactive communication on social media. Establishing a connection between communication oriented towards dialogue and relationships with online customers is deemed crucial. The findings suggest that adept utilization of social networks can also contribute to achieving public relations objectives.

Digital marketing transformations across industries: trends, challenges, and opportunities

Piroșcă et al. (2021) analyze the impacts of digital efficiency on the development of the labor market, and they conclude that the correlation between salary wages and digital proficiency highlights the need for a sustained initiative to enhance individuals' digital skills. This effort is essential to foster a more efficient and adaptable labor market. Speaking about the tyre industry, in their work, Chicu et al. (2020) presented the latest trends in the technologies used for the development of this industry, and which are the factors that contribute to its growth. They concluded that increasing productivity is based on the use of new digital technologies which leads to producing higher quality tyres, which are more reliable.

In an extended study consisting of 11 CEE countries, Pelinescu et al. highlighted the influence of digitization on the welfare of the population. The paper emphasized the significance of elements like human capital, research endeavors, and digitization capabilities in securing well-being, as measured by gross domestic product per capita.

Cosmulese et al. (2020) deal with the impact of internally generated intangible assets on the market value of the companies. They unveiled the influence of the disclosed and undisclosed intellectual assets on the market value of entities, with a particular emphasis on the distinction between manufacturing and service companies. This discovery adds value to the capital market and underscores a significant connection between disclosure compliance and the respective industry sector. In another study, Tohănean et al. (2020) examine the entrepreneurial conduct of 92 technology-based companies in the European business market. Their goal is to comprehend how these companies achieve economic growth by effectively implementing sustainable innovations, steering clear of foreseeable risks, and preparing for unforeseen challenges. Additionally, the study aims to offer a best-practice guide for similar companies navigating through this transformative process. The study concluded that a tangible connection exists between enhancing the ability for international expansion and fostering innovation within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Consequently, the internationalization and advancement of innovative business models are deemed pivotal strategies for enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs and promoting the development of regional economies. Given that a significant portion of the economy comprises SMEs, it is imperative for researchers and forums/decision-makers to accord them due attention.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review sheds light on the evolving landscape of digital marketing research in Romania, in the last years. The analysis of current studies reveals a dynamic and rapidly changing environment marked by the increasing integration of digital technologies into marketing strategies. The identified trends emphasize the growing significance of social media, consumer behavior, and e-commerce in the Romanian market. Furthermore, the review underscores the need for future research to delve deeper into emerging areas such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and virtual reality within the digital marketing field. As Romania continues to embrace digital transformation, researchers and practitioners alike are presented with new challenges and opportunities. Overall, this synthesis of literature provides a valuable foundation for understanding the trajectory of digital marketing research in Romania and offers insights that can guide future investigations and strategic decisions in this dynamic field.

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