

# Digital Marketing Media and Brand Communications

Mr. Sony Varghese

*Assistant Professor, XIME-Kochi*

**Abstract:** *Digital marketing has revolutionised the field of marketing in recent years. Online platforms on which users can exchange their views on products, has become a very important factor in the marketing communication program of companies. It requires the induction of the new technology into the marketing approach of companies for building a brand identity and effectively communicating it. Establishing brand awareness and a positive brand image in consumer's minds requires a highly focussed digital marketing strategy. It may be accomplished through social media platforms like Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and the like. Digital media has paved way for easier and faster, direct and personalised engagement with customers. A simple question on a company's website may solicit thousands of responses in a matter of hours or even minutes. Depending more and more on each other than on companies for information, consumers are becoming increasingly influential with respect to the brands they are interacting about (Muñiz & Schau 2007; Cova & Dall' 2009). Understanding the possibilities and managing the risks of brand communication, a company can create a strong brand (Keller, 2001; Kotler, 2003). The main idea of branding is that everything a company does communicates and that successful brand management will secure the right position for the company's products in the mind of the customer. This paper henceforth contributes to an emerging area of enquiry by exploring the opportunities of digital marketing and its implications on brand communication and creation of a vibrant brand image.*

**Key words:** *Digital Marketing, Social Media, Brand.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital and mobile communications, practitioners are continuously challenged on their ability to adapt in an ever-changing digital environment. The growing popularity of digital advertising leads advertisers to invest more effort into communicating with consumers through the digital medium. The academic literature is abounding with commentary about the need for marketers to develop promotional strategies that are more of a conversation with customers than a one-way communication (Jaffe, 2007; Weber, 2007; Bernoff and Li, 2008). This shift in emphasis is changing the way companies spend their money (Kessler, 2007). Co-creation offers a whole new perspective on how to see the firm's fundamental ability to create long-term value and brand equity (Helm and Jones 2010). In co-creation, value is a function of experiences that take place outside the product

itself, for example at web platforms where consumers interact within a community (Ramaswamy 2009).

Earlier ways to understand brand value creation was assumed to happen inside the firm, in the production of goods, which was subsequently sold to consumers. Today business managers have recognized that they need to involve more persons in creating long-term brand value, which requires extending the thought of value production to include more people outside the firm in the value-generating process, which include much more than the production of goods (Merz, He and Vargo 2009). Offline media appear to have declining ability to engage customers and influence brand experiences, so companies are beginning to invest more money in digital media which has become the mainstream. The Internet is increasingly becoming part of the basic business model for many companies and it is rapidly becoming an integral part of the traditional economy (the internet economy indicators, 2001). It has in particular sparked a shift in how people communicate with each other and in how companies can communicate with their stakeholders. Thus, the impact of the internet on communication has being remarkable, especially that of the services like Email, World Wide Web. Adamson, a New York brand consultant and the author of BrandDigital and BrandSimple, claims that a brand's Facebook page constitutes a public profile that can generate thoughtful conversations going between a company and consumers, but also between consumers. Such conversations can yield enhanced insights about human thought and behaviour. Learning about what people think, say and do about their brands is the first step to achieving brand success, and "the better the quality of the insights, the better the chance of establishing a brand promise that genuinely meets consumer needs and expectations". Organizations must use any means available to listen and learn for differentiating their brands in ways that matter (Forbes, 2011). In this setting, the users are exposed to brand related messages and are encouraged to engage in brand centred social relations. The motivation for this shift is the increasing penetration of the Internet into households across the globe. By gaining insight into how users interact with online technology, marketers may be able to develop more precise strategies for influencing their purchase behaviours. This paper henceforth contributes to an emerging area of enquiry by exploring the opportunities of digital marketing and its implications

on brand communication and creation of a vibrant brand image. Furthermore, there is a need to examine whether it is strategically feasible to translate the corporate brand values from marketplace to market space.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research paper contributes to an emerging area of enquiry by exploring the opportunities of digital marketing and highlights its growing importance in brand communication.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The study depends primarily on secondary data for understanding the concept of digital marketing and examines whether it is strategically feasible to translate the corporate brand values from marketplace to market space.

## IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concepts related to brand in the academic literature have changed over time. The meaning of brand and the essence of brand have developed from having been merely the product or the company to individual consumer experience (Tynan et al, 2010). The traditional system of company-centric value creation, which had served us over the past 100 years, is changing into an economy in which competition centers on personalized co-creation experiences (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Many academic researchers have recently agreed on that consumer, together with other stakeholders of a firm, play

a principal role in co-creating brand value. Therefore, it is important for companies to learn about stakeholders' thoughts, feelings, knowledge and experiences related to the brand.

## 4.1 DIGITAL MARKETING

Businesses may consider these virtual communities as channels to convey their information and communication flows. In today's global markets, where ICT (Information Communication Technology) is now widespread, information and communication channels are primarily digital channels (adopting specific technologies that continue to evolve in time, from the duplex telephone line, to optic fibres, wireless connection, etc.), while communication flows are digital packages that can contain data, sound, images, film or various combinations of the same, indifferently. The digitalisation of flows and channels impacts on all marketing activities, from analysis to operations, the definition of the most suitable product for the market, its distribution, price setting and, obviously, communication. One important effect of digitalisation on marketing activities can be seen in particular in the way the boundaries between certain activities are collapsing, for example, in the field of communication and information. Corporate communication is used not only to convey a message to the market, but above all for the feedback that it can generate. In digital marketing, there is both push communication and pull communication.

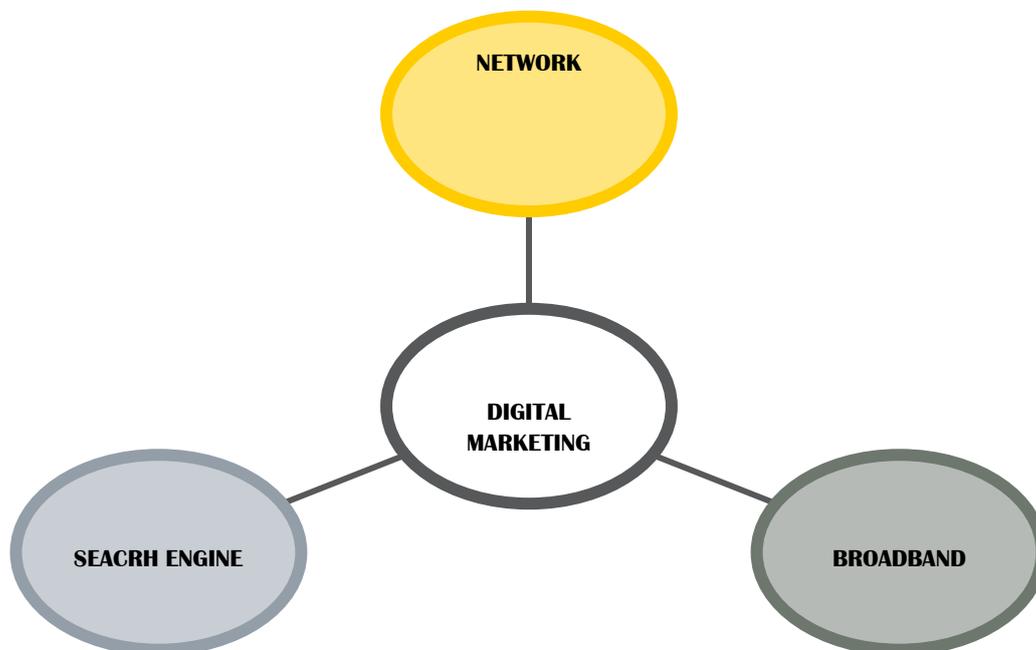


Fig.1: Four Driving Forces Driving Change in Digital world

In push communication, the company promotes a message and communicates it by 'pushing' it along a channel to an audience that is usually not directly interested in it (passive interest), whereas in the case of pull communication, the communication flow is actually requested by the market. So the market takes action to acquire the information flow (business communication), and thus has a precise interest in it (active interest). The transformation of the passive interest of many communication flows into active interest is one of the most important innovations introduced to marketing communication by digital technology, responding to a precise communication objective of global corporations, to maximise the efficiency of the expenses met.

According to Jaffe (2005) there are four forces driving the rate of change in the digital revolution. This causes marketing and business people to rethink marketing communications and objectives. The driving forces are presented in Figure 1 below: broadband, wireless, search and networks. Broadband has the power to connect and enable everyone to be connected and thus reduces the lag between exposure and action. Wireless, also known as WIFI refers to enable free movement of people while being connected. Search engines are online facilitators of connectivity with information connection and knowledge. Additionally, networks allow people to interact with different communities and thus stay connected, informed and unified (Jaffe 2005.).

The banners, buttons, etc. which open up in Internet connections to numerous sites, are forms of online advertising whose aim is to prompt the surfer to 'click' to obtain information about a product, a brand or a company offer. They demand the user's involvement and he chooses to search for more information, thus making it possible to transmit the corporate communication in a personalised form, in a timeframe and content that can develop an active interest in the user. Reactions that respond to digital marketing communication have a dual significance for the company that promotes them: on one hand they measure the effectiveness of the communication itself, while on the other they allow information to be acquired about specific figures targeted by the communication, enriching the knowledge profile and offering the company elements that are decisive for the entire marketing process. Grönholm, a Swedish brand manager observes, "Branding is changing to the ground. New technologies and media channels have moved society from mass production to mass contribution" (Carlsson 2009).

#### 4.2 CORPORATE BRANDING

Brands vary in power they exercise in the marketplace - because, ultimately, their power resides in the minds of consumers (de Chernatony 2006; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998; Kapferer 2008). One of the

traditional ways to define the word brand is "a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of these that identifies the products or services of one seller or group of sellers and differentiates them from those of competitors" (Kotler and Armstrong 2009). Keller (2008) takes a wider perspective making a distinction between the brand definition as set by American Marketing Association (AMA) and the industry's concept of branding. Keller (2008) adds tangible and intangible brand elements, rational and emotional brand elements, and symbolic brand elements which differentiate and identify a brand. Hence, Keller's definition is taken from a more holistic point of view: "A brand is therefore more than a product, because it can have dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same needs" (Keller, 2008). Van Gelder (2003) recognises the managerial interdependencies and argues that "a brand is the translation of the business strategy into a consumer experience that brings about specific behaviour".

To develop the brand onto brand leadership and gain sustainable market share, organisations need to manage the brand carefully in the appropriate direction. For this reason, Kapferer (2008) stated that the brand must be: (1) embodied in products, services and places; (2) put into practice by people at contact points; (3) activated by needs and behaviours; (4) communicated; and (5) distributed.

Brands, according to Kapferer (2008) serve eight functions shown in Table 1 below. The first two are mechanical and concern the essence of the brand: "to function as a recognised symbol in order to facilitate choice and to gain time"; the next three are for reducing the perceived risk; and the final three concern the pleasure side of a brand. He adds that brands perform an economic function in the mind of the consumer, "the value of the brand comes from its ability to gain an exclusive, positive and prominent meaning in the minds of a large number of consumers". Therefore branding and brand building should focus on developing brand value. Kapferer (2008) addressed several brand functions which justify the attractiveness and value of the brand from a customer perspective.

It is only recently that the term "corporate brand" has emerged and has captured many academics' and practitioners' attention, as it is claimed that research is now shifting from product to corporate branding (Olins,2000). The company and its corporate and product brands can help to substantiate the credibility of the firm's corporate image (Dowling, 1986). Corporate branding has been defined by Van Riel( 2001) as "a systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintain a favourable reputation of the company with its constituent elements by sending signals to stakeholders using the corporate brand". Corporate branding is a systematically

planned and implemented process of creating and sending signals to all stakeholders by managing behaviour, maintaining favourable images and consequently a communication, and symbolism (Einwiller & Will 2002). favourable reputation of the company as a whole by

Table 1: The functions of the brand for the consumer

FUNCTION	CONSUMER BENEFIT
IDENTIFICATION	To be clearly seen, to make sense of the offer, to quickly identify the sought-after products.
PRACTICALITY	To allow savings of time and to allow savings of time and energy through identical repurchasing and loyalty.
GURANTEE	To be sure of finding the same quality no matter where or when you buy the product or service.
OPTIMISATION	To be sure of buying the best product in its category, the best performer for a particular purpose
CHARACTERISATION	To have confirmation of your self-image or the image that you present to others.
CONTINUITY	Satisfaction brought about through familiarity and intimacy with the brand that you have been consuming for years.
HEDONISTIC	Satisfaction linked to the attractiveness of the brand, to its logo, to its communication.
ETHICAL	Satisfaction linked to the responsible behaviour of the brand in its relationship towards society.

Source: Kapferer, 2008

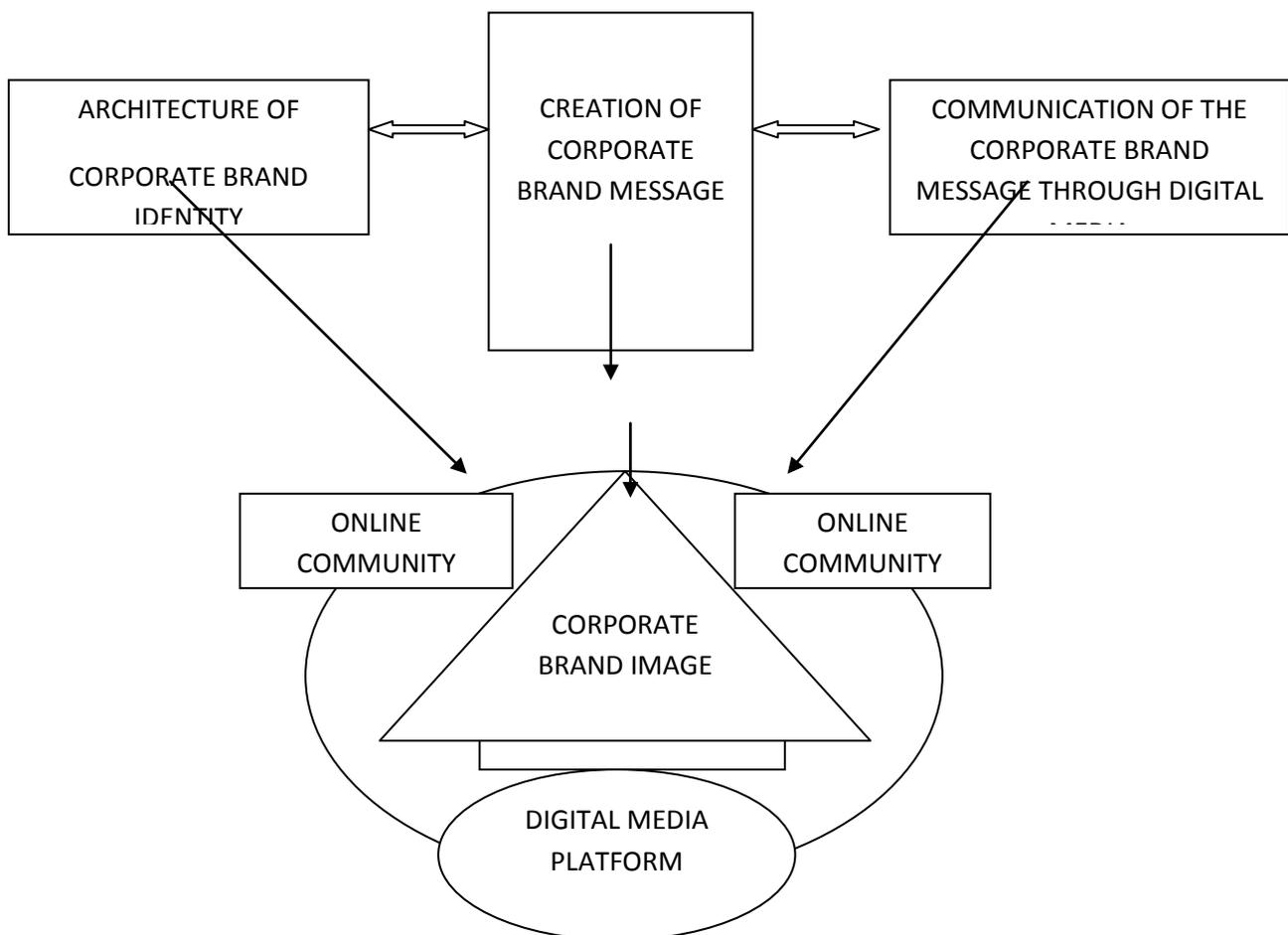


Fig. 2: Conceptual model of the study

Corporate branding is something that companies believe is important but until recently there has been little consensus about a definition. Identity, values and communication are frequently mentioned in relation to the corporate brand. Balmer (2001) remarked that the corporate brand proposition should be derived from the organizational identity. He further defined the ‘corporate brand mix’ as consisting of ‘...cultural, intricate, tangible and ethereal elements’ as well as commitment from staff and senior management.

Hence, the concept of the corporate brand embodies the notion of communicating the values of the organization to a network of stakeholders, both internal and external to the organization, through corporate rather than just marketing communication vehicles. Therefore, in conveying the corporate brand values it is important to develop a framework for consistent communication that ensures the continuity of the brand. It appears that conveying the corporate brand values consistently through the mechanism of the Internet has been a major challenge for companies.

A strong brand attracts loyal customers who repeatedly purchase the same brand, and it can maximise the effectiveness of marketing activities. Furthermore a strong brand creates value to the customer and this way increases corporate profits over the long term, enhancing the overall corporate value. There are three benefits of a strong brand, which increase profitable growth for the company. The model seen in Figure 2 below illustrates how corporate brand communication through digital medium starts from corporate brand identity and is communicated in the form

of corporate brand message through digital medium so as to form a brand image in the minds of the stakeholders in the online community.

**V. DIGITAL MARKETING AND CORPORATE BRAND COMMUNICATION**

Some companies are hailing the Internet as an outstanding way to enhance their business activities, particularly those that are small and want to compete globally. On the other hand, for companies where personal client servicing is important, the assessment of the value of the Internet is less optimistic (Rasian, 2001). Yet it is clear that companies that do not adapt to marketplace can face ‘...painful competition from competitors who have switched their strategies to the more technologically-based relationships’ (Zineldin, 2000: 9). The digital marketing has been described as ‘...an all-purpose communication medium for interacting with a wide variety of stakeholders’ (Watson, Zinkhan and Pitt, 2000: 97). The digital medium can take on many communication roles including: 1) as a persuasive advertising medium, 2) as a means to educate or inform customers, 3) as a way to communicate and interact with buyers, 4) as a means of building and maintaining customer relationships, or 6) simply as a source of entertainment (Belch and Belch 2001: 19). Interactivity and customization feature of digital medium offers the ability to ‘co-brand’ with consumers to create individual ‘my brands’ that complement the corporate brand (Wind, Mahajan, and Gunther, 2002). Table 2 presents the examples of three types of usage of brand related digital media namely: consuming, contributing, and creating.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF BRAND RELATED DIGITAL MEDIA USAGE

CRITERION	EXAMPLES OF BRAND RELATED DIGITAL MEDIA USAGE
CONSUMING	1. Viewing brand related video 2. Listening to brand related video 3. Watching brand related pictures/images 4. Following the threads on online brand community forums. 5. Reading comments on brand profiles on social network sites. 6. Reading product reviews 7. Playing branded online games
CONTRIBUTING	1. Rating products or brands 2. Joining a brand profile on social network site. 3. Commenting on brand related weblogs, video, audio, pictures etc. 4. Engaging in branded conversation eg: online brand community forums or social network sites
CREATING	1. Publishing a brand related weblog 2. Uploading brand related video, audio, picture. 3. Writing brand related articles 4. Writing product reviews.

SOURCE: Mutinga, Moorman, Smit, 2011.

**Findings**

The corporate websites are an excellent way to convey text information and detail. It is a rational medium where stakeholders can obtain detailed information on products and services, it is effective for short and long term promotions, and it complements other media used by the company.

One of the main disadvantages is that the website is not effective in stimulating corporate brand related responses.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Long-term brand equity and growth depends on the ability of a company to successfully integrate and implement all elements of a comprehensive marketing program. Digital marketing communication is directed to profiled targets, which are active in the communication process. Every communication flow can ask for an information answer from the market. This opportunity grants immediate feedbacks and feed-forwards, so that digital communication can be easily and cheaply measured; digital communication flows are diffused at costs that are getting lower and lower, but it asks specialized and deep competences to communication managers. A symbiotic relationship is possible through the interaction of organizational and customer values/identity. The most pressing issue that affects perception of the corporate brand in market space is whether the organization is using the Internet as a communications medium or as a business. Digital communication can measure results on the basis of numerous elements such as the large number of targets reached the subjectivity and specific characteristics of the targets contacted, and the times and methods of the response obtained. This type of measurement clearly differs from channel to channel and for each specific type of communication tool activated.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Kim , W . C . and Mauborgne , R , 2003, "Tipping point leadership" ,Harvard Business Review, 81 (4): 60 – 69.
- [2]. Zamaria , C . and Fletcher , F ,2008, " Canada online! The Internet, Media and Emerging Technologies: Uses, Attitudes, Trends and International Comparisons" Toronto, Canada: Canadian Internet Project.
- [3]. Li , C . and Bernoff , J ,2008, " Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies" . Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- [4]. Weber, L,2007, " Marketing to the Social Web: How Digital Communities Build Your Business" , Hoboken,NJ: John Wiley & Sons .
- [5]. Bernoff, J. and Li, C. ,2008, " Harnessing the Power of the Oh-So-Social Web". MIT Sloan , Management Review .