

The Evolution of Marketing Strategies

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Abstract

The study examines the development of marketing strategy from the early twentieth century's focus on production-oriented and sales-driven approaches to the current era's focus on digital and data-centric models. The study covers major developments in marketing strategy, including the advent of relationship marketing, the introduction of the marketing mix (4Ps), and the swift expansion of digital marketing. The study explores the emergence of influencer collaboration, data-driven personalization, and social media marketing as key cornerstones driving digital age marketing. It further elaborates on how marketing has grown more interactive, determinable, and human-centered with the merger of both online and offline platforms leveraging rapid technological advancement, maintaining relevance. Furthermore, creating impact requires adaptability, inventiveness backed by data-driven insight. As Kotler claims, even though its reach has expanded beyond commercial domains, marketing will always be an essential differentiator for an organization's success in a dynamic competitive market.

Keywords: Marketing Evolution, Social media, Traditional Marketing, Digital Age

Introduction

Marketing has always been at the center of how we perceive a brand or an organization. Even though marketing as a discipline has been around for decades, there is a huge difference in its understanding today and at the beginning of its perception.

In the early years, brands often employed traditional marketing strategies such as newspaper, cable, and radio advertisements. These methods are employed to date. However, with the unprecedented growth of social media and the internet, these methods are no longer effective and sufficient. According to Reich (1998), marketing communication is an evolving process and it must meet the ever-increasing demands and attention placed on it as the sole surviving, sustainable, competitive advantage in today's marketing climate, which is rife with parity and lookalikes. Moreover, not only have the marketing strategies changed, but the way consumers perceive and rely on these strategies for decision-making has also evolved tremendously.

Before the digital age

Before any focus on promotion or advertising, when it came to selling products, brands focused on what was called the 'production stage'. According to Keith (1960), this stage lasted from 1870 to 1933 and during this time, the firm was the main emphasis of the business, not the customers. Businesses produced products what they could and focused on resolving production issues. This stage aimed to

produce as many products as possible in a short period of time so that the consumer would buy them.

Historically, selling and marketing were often used interchangeably. As a result, numerous books focused on personal selling as a way for marketers to connect with consumers. Examples include managing personal selling, advertising (Stanton, 1967), selling (Tousley et al., 1962), personal selling and advertising medium, and referring to the seller (Boyd & Levy, 1967). A top-down approach was implemented, with a focus on products rather than consumers thereby producing a product, priced it to maximize profits, and distributed it to stores. The sales-driven approach was demonstrated by the emphasis on persuading customers to purchase rather than building a rapport with the consumers. During this time, the firm's primary purpose was sales volume, with profit as a byproduct. Apart from this, one of the most prominent marketing strategies to promote products would be lowering the product cost. Brands often felt this would immediately give them an upper hand over their competitors. This was often defined as the 'Sales Era'. For instance, in the mid twentieth century, the sales of Coca-Cola were insufficient during the winters. Instead of focusing on building a strong brand identity, the brand came up with a short-term strategy by placing ads with Santa Claus in them. As per them, by attaching Santa Claus to their ads, they were embodying the brand with winter.

During this time, how a brand would communicate with the consumer was quite limited. They would

often rely on radio shows, billboards, print media, door-to-door sales, and cable networks to advertise products or brands. Print media and billboards would typically be information-heavy, with large texts and an archaic representation of the product. These promotional ads would try to connect with the target audience by showcasing an aspirational life that the consumers would have by buying the product.

Celebrities and beauty businesses frequently collaborate in the hopes that viewers who wish to imitate their lifestyles would be convinced to buy the product. For instance, Lux would frequently collaborate with Indian film actors such as Rekha, Helen, and Zeenat Aman. The brand positioned these actors as a symbol of cultivated beauty and grace. They posed as icons of the Indian film industry. This strategy did work for a while. However, the current generation has become more conscious of their purchasing decisions, opting instead to buy something that doesn't feature a celebrity's picture.

In the 1960s, the 4 P's of marketing were introduced by E. Jerome McCarthy. The marketing mix consists mostly of four Ps: product, price, place, and promotion. "The marketing mix is the combination of controllable marketing variables that a company uses to pursue the desired level of sales in the target market," according to Philip Kotler. These pillars of the marketing mix were central to the marketing plans developed during this time and continue to hold immense value.

Post the sales orientation phase, marketing became the primary focus. The clear distinction between selling and marketing was visibility understood by marketers (Holtz, 1982). Brands started placing more focus on building a personal connection with consumers and prioritizing their needs. The products that were produced were decided by the customers. During this time, Profit was more important to businesses than sales volume. The shift from sales-oriented to marketing-oriented management not only had an impact on sales messaging and pricing, but also on product quality, packaging, distribution techniques, and promotion. They started resonating with the audience by invoking emotions and culturally relevant ads. For instance, Pond's introduced the Googly Woogly Woosh advertisement as part of their cold creams campaign

in the 1990s. The Googly Woogly Woosh slogan, when combined with cheek-touching, evoked feelings of affection and closeness that could otherwise be dismissed as meaningless. Through this, Pond's produced an unforgettable campaign that naturally appeals to the audience's emotions.

Customers desired personalized products and services suited to their specific requirements and preferences. Soon, brands understood the impact of retaining long-term relationships with consumers instead of occasional one-time interactions. Cant and Machado (1998) emphasized the importance of client retention, product benefits, long-term scale, high-quality customer service, commitment, and interaction, as well as quality. This was often referred to as 'relationship marketing'. As per Kotler, Relationship marketing involves four major constituents: customers, workers, marketing partners (channels, suppliers, distributors, dealers, agencies), and those belonging to the financial community (shareholders, investors, and analysts). Marketers must provide success for all stakeholders while balancing their returns. For instance, Apple encouraged local user groups for its computers. In 2009, there were over 700 groups, ranging from under 30 to over 1,000 members. The organizations offered Apple owners the chance to learn more about their computers, discuss ideas, and receive product discounts. They organized unique events and provided community service. This move made sure consumers would have one-on-one interaction with the brand.

2. The Digital Age

The 2000s witnessed a new wave of marketing strategies due to the onset of social media platforms. There were barely 16 million internet users in December 1995, according to reports. In contrast, the number rose to 4,536 million in June 2019, accounting for 58.8% of the world's population, or 7.71 billion people (Busca and Bertrandias, 2020). The Internet and the rise of the digital age introduced a plethora of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. Marketers could now more effectively and efficiently reach, notify, engage, sell to, research, and offer services to the targeted audience, thanks to consumers' migration from traditional to digital media.

Through these platforms, businesses were able to communicate with customers more directly, learn about their wants and preferences, and offer more individualized product and service solutions. Enterprises were able to have a more thorough grasp of consumer behavior and industry trends owing to the extensive use of big data analysis technology. For marketers looking to increase sales, interact with consumers, and raise brand awareness, it has become a vital tool. Missing social media can be equivalent to missing a sizable section of your potential market in this digital age. Building a solid brand reputation can be accomplished through social media. For instance, keeping a close eye on and reacting to consumer sentiments. Feedback on social media platforms can help you resolve issues quickly and show that you care about their satisfaction.

2.1 Content Marketing

The Content Marketing Institute defines content marketing as a strategic approach that creates and distributes valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a targeted audience, ultimately driving profitable customer interaction. Over the years, content marketing has become a key element in the digital era. It has helped brands raise awareness as well as create enduring connections with their customers. Storytelling of brands has become central to content marketing. An imminent form of content marketing is user-generated content which is often generated by micro influencers or beloved customers in an attempt to contribute to the brand's credibility and visibility. In 2024, Forbes reported this industry to be valued at over \$600 billion. This number has increased substantially over the years. Forbes also reports that over 90% of marketers have used content marketing tactics in their marketing plans. It is no longer treated as optional. One of the most creative examples of content marketing was executed by Spotify. At the end of every year, Spotify curates a personalized enumeration of every individual user's most loved songs, artists, and albums. This is known as 'Spotify Wrapped'. This strategy has led to millions of user-generated content every year on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter.

2.2 Influencer Marketing

Alongside this, content marketing has given birth to a new profession - Influencer Marketing. Influencers

disguise themselves under an internet persona, showcasing their day-to-day life, trying to create a unique connection with the audience. Brands tap into this industry with the hope that the niche audience of influencers will help achieve higher levels of engagement. As per the Harvard Review, at the end of 2023, the global influencer industry was worth \$21 billion. According to Adobe, 300 million people worldwide and 27 million Americans identify as content creators. This startling fact is demonstrated by surveys conducted by Nielsen, Reuters, and others. In today's time, people often find influencers more trustworthy than celebrities or journalists when it comes to relaying any information. Not only this, but it has become a field of profession that many young people are determined to venture into. An example of this would be Airbnb. Airbnb has utilised influencer marketing to the fullest. They reach out to macro as well as micro influencers - offering them rentals during their holiday in return for promotional content on social media platforms. Some of these influencers include Alanna Pandey, Arunay Sood, and Ankita Chawla. Recently, the brand announced a set of unique experiences hosted by some of the most influential names today. This included a living session by Doja Cat, Janhvi Kapoor's Chennai home, and the Barbie mansion.

2.3 Personalized Marketing

Personalized marketing has emerged as a leading player in the digital era. It offers customers individualized goods, services, and experiences by thoroughly comprehending their unique characteristics. A crucial aspect of this is 'Search Engine Optimization'. SEO strategies are adopted by marketers to understand user behaviors and preferences. These strategies include creating interactive content, using relevant keywords, and improving website performance. Through these strategies, businesses were able to gain in-depth user insights. Moreover, brands have also employed tactics such as recommendations, targeted advertisements, and customized email campaigns as part of their personalized marketing campaigns. An example of utilising SEO strategies would be Nike. The brand places immense focus on creating a user-friendly experience on its website. This can be seen through their use of accurate keywords, lucid

descriptions of the products, and making URLs product-specific.

2.4 Email Marketing

Email marketing isn't a new strategy; in fact, it has been around since before the immense popularity of Instagram. However, the way businesses use it today has evolved. Businesses often use an opt-in email list with a big customer base as an effective tool for sharing information about products, coupons, and announcing the launch of new items. Moreover, many organizations have introduced digital newsletters that not only promote their products but also engage the consumer with interactive content. For instance, Starbucks often sends emails regarding re-engagement and loyalty programs to keep the consumer interested. Moreover, they also engage in sending emails on your birthday about a special discount or treat from them.

2.5 Mobile Marketing

Brands often use text messages and software as a crucial tactic to reach their customers. These text messages include promotions, special discounts, launches, etc. For instance, nowadays, if a consumer is shopping from a particular brand and does not go ahead with their order, brands send text messages reminding the consumer that there is something left in their cart and that they should go back and buy it. Another way through which brands employ mobile marketing is by creating their own apps or by relying on pre-existing apps to showcase ads. An example of this would be Zomato. The brand often sends notifications - invoking one's cravings, amusing one-liners, or notifying someone that they have left something in their cart.

2.6 Artificial Intelligence and Marketing

Today, the broad field of modern artificial intelligence (AI) uses sophisticated methods to provide insights from vast volumes of data generated on digital platforms. The basic idea behind artificial intelligence is to teach machines to learn, reason, and solve problems that we face regularly.

In the domain of digital marketing, artificial intelligence has become highly essential. The key question facing marketers today is not whether to utilize AI to solve these and other issues, but rather which AI tools and techniques to employ. The

necessity is obvious: in order to be competitive, let alone outperform it, today's marketing professionals must include AI in their campaigns (Dr. Pradeep, A.Appel, S.Sthanunathan, 2019)

With the help of data supplied to coding, machines are able to produce content and campaigns from scratch. This is extremely helpful when someone is running short on time and wants to save resources. For instance, Coca-Cola recently launched the 'Create Real Magic' campaign where users are provided with AI tools to create their own personalized artwork featuring their signature bottle. In addition to producing content, it also assists in making product and service recommendations based on user behavior, interests, and searches. Myntra has recently launched a feature in the app that can assist the user in purchasing products similar to their previously purchased items or recently viewed products.

Artificial intelligence is accurately able to understand the unique characteristics and behavior of an intended group of people. They assist marketers in identifying microtrends and even forecasting trends. As a result, they can make swift strategic decisions - firms may cut down on wasteful digital advertising and make sure their investment yields the most returns.

2.7 Integration of Online and Offline Marketing

While offline marketing refers to the use of non-media advertising tools to accomplish "one-to-one interaction" style communication, online marketing is a type of marketing strategy conducted over the Internet. Online and offline marketing platforms are no longer viewed in isolation. Instead, they complement each other. Social media integration broadens reach and engagement, whilst events and partnerships guarantee a more intimate rapport with the consumer.

For instance, Zomato not only has an exceptional presence on social media with their witty one-liners and meme-driven strategy, but they also employ offline campaigns. Recently, the founder of Zomato, Deepinder Goyal, assumed the role of a Zomato delivery boy for a day. He imitated exactly what their life looked like, alongside documenting it. This move proved Zomato to be a brand that sympathizes with all of their employees, not just a section of

them, and promises to work towards their betterment for a healthy work environment.

Conclusion

As per Kotler, if there is a lack of demand for particular goods or services that turn into a profit for the company, functions such as finance, operations, and accounting won't hold significance. Hence, marketing is a key element for financial success.

Marketing as a discipline encompasses society at large. It is through marketing that products that have eased one's life have been introduced in our day-to-day activities. Marketing is no longer just concerned with the selling and promotion of products themselves. In contrast to the olden days, it is no longer just considered a mere social or commercial function. The marketing approach has experienced a radical transition from traditional to digital. In the current age, it is imperative that marketing techniques evolve to meet the realities of technology and rising consumer expectations. To be relevant and fulfill changing market demands, enterprises must constantly learn, modify, and experiment.

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